The New Criterion

June 1994

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Notes & Comments, 1
Willem de Kooning at 90 *by Hilton Kramer*, 4
The vocation of philosophy *by Roger Kimball*, 10
Joseph Conrad *by Joseph Epstein*, 16
The art of Louise Bourgeois *by Karen Wilkin*, 26
Four early poems *by W. H. Auden*, 32

Art: After Judd *by Jed Perl*, 38; **Exhibition notes** *by Eric Gibson & Roger Kimball*, 42; **Theater:** New directors, new directions *by Donald Lyons*, 45; **The media:** Nixon & "Middlemarch," revised for the 90s *by James Bowman*, 52 **Fiction chronicle:** New maps of Cheever Country *by Brooke Allen*, 58; **Books:** *Christina Hoff Sommers* Who stole feminism? *reviewed by Heather Mac Donald*, 66; *Gertrude Himmelfarb* On looking into the abyss *reviewed by Terry Teachout*, 70; *Martha Bayles* Hole in our soul *reviewed by Mark Steyn*, 73; *Charles Tomlinson* The door in the wall *reviewed by Robert Richman*, 76; *Ian Hamilton* Keepers of the flame *reviewed by Thomas Mallon*, 80; **Notebook:** William Arrowsmith *by James W. Tuttleton*, 85; **Index**, 91

Volume 12, Number 10, $4.75

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE FIGURE

Lennart Andersen
Leland Bell
Robert De Niro
John Dubrow
Paul Georges
Louisa Matthiasdottir
Graham Nickson
Paul Resika
Clifford Ross
Euan Uglow

Selected Gallery Artists from June 2 to August 31

Salander-O'Reilly Galleries

20 East 79 Street New York 10021 Tel (212) 879-6606

Summer hours: Monday-Friday 9:30 to 5:30

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Clement Greenberg

[1909–1994]

In Memoriam

Lawrence Salander William O'Reilly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SAM FRANCIS

Recent Paintings

Fifth Floor June 7 to July 15

JUDY PFAFF

New Works on Paper

Project Space Sixth Floor June 7 to July 15

André Emmerich Gallery

41 East 57th Street New York, NY 10022

Tel (212) 752-0124 Fax (212) 371-7345

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New Criterion *June 1994*

Editor *Hilton Kramer*
Publisher *Samuel Lipman*
Managing Editor *Roger Kimball*
Poetry Editor *Robert Richman*
Associate Editor *Christopher Carduff*
Office Manager *Marjorie Danser*
Editorial Intern *Sarah Bright*

Contributors to this issue

Brooke Allen reviewed Kingsley Amis's *The Russian Girl* for our May issue.

W. H. Auden's *Juvenilia: Poems, 1922–1928* will be published this summer by Princeton University Press.

James Bowman is the American editor of the London *Times Literary Supplement* and the film critic of *The American Spectator*.

Joseph Epstein is editor of *The American Scholar*. His essay on Conrad is adapted from the introduction to the forthcoming Bantam Classics edition of *Almayer's Folly & The Secret Agent*.

Eric Gibson's study of Clement Meadmore is forthcoming from Hudson Hills Press.

Roger Kimball is the author of *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (HarperPerennial).

Donald Lyons's book, *Independent Visions: A Critical Introduction to Recent Independent American Film*, is now out from Ballantine.

Heather Mac Donald is a contributing editor of the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal*.

Thomas Mallon's new novel, *Henry and Clara*, is coming in August from Ticknor & Fields.

Jed Perl is the author, most recently, of *Gallery Going: Four Seasons in the Art World* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).

Robert Richman's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Yale Review*, *The Nation*, and other publications.

Mark Steyn is a columnist for the London *Daily Telegraph* and the host of "Postcard from Gotham," a weekly program on BBC radio.

Terry Teachout, arts columnist of the New York *Daily News*, is writing *H. L. Mencken: A Life* and editing *A Second Mencken Chrestomathy*.

James W. Tuttleton is a professor of English at New York University.

Karen Wilkin's column "At the Galleries" is a regular feature of *Partisan Review*.

Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. June 1994, Volume 12, Number 10. Subscriptions: $36 for one year, $65 for two. Outside the United States, add $7 per year. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. Copyright © 1994 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior Street, Sandusky, OH 44870. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date.

Advertising: Galleries & fine arts: Kate Shanley, 799 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. (212) 477-4905. Publishers & others: Richard A. Vaughan/Laurie Barton, 129 Phelps Avenue, Rockford, IL 61108. (815) 398-8569.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard with the Flexicon Composer from E-Type Design Associates, and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Urban Visions

Ivan Kustura - Drawings
David Hatchett - Sculpture
May 19 - August 19

Farah Damji Gallery
23 East 81st Street New York NY 10021 Tel (212) 472-6676
Tuesday - Saturday, 11am - 6pm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes & Comments: June 1994

Clement Greenberg, 1909–1994

With the death of Clement Greenberg on May 7, the most important art critic of our time—the greatest in English since Roger Fry—has passed from the scene. Beginning with the essay he wrote in 1939 called "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," which promptly became a classic in the literature of modernism, Greenberg's criticism did more to illuminate the vicissitudes and achievements of modernist art in the period of the Second World War and the immediate postwar period than that of any other writer. Those years were, of course, the heyday of the Abstract Expressionist movement, with which he was closely identified, and he wrote about the artists of that movement—mainly in *Partisan Review* and *The Nation*—with an uncommon understanding and authority.

Yet his critical interests were by no means confined to the accomplishments of the New York School—or, for that matter, to the visual arts. About literature, politics, and the problems of modern cultural life—most pertinently, the problems of high art in an era dominated by the imperatives of popular culture—he also wrote with great intelligence. He brought a highly developed historical sense to his examination of the art and culture of the modern period, and he brought to that task something else that was equally important and equally rare—an insistence on the priority to be given aesthetic standards in the judgment of works of art.

It was not a priority universally shared by his contemporaries, even in the art world, and it often provoked an antagonism that degenerated into *ad hominem* invective. (See, for example, Rosalind Krauss's vicious attack in *The Optical Unconscious*, published just last year.) Yet he remained steadfast in his belief that what counted, above all, in the judgment of art was aesthetic quality, and that belief won him the devotion of many artists and critics who may sometimes have disagreed as to where aesthetic quality was to be found but who never doubted that the discernment of it was the *raison d'être* of criticism itself.

Like Roger Fry—and like T. S. Eliot, whom Greenberg once upheld as "the greatest of all literary critics"—he was often accused of wielding dictatorial powers over contemporary critical opinion. It was a charge that was much exaggerated in Greenberg's case, for the majority of the new reputations to achieve commercial and institutional success in his time never enjoyed his critical support.

The odd thing about the charge of a Greenbergian dictatorship was that it did not achieve any real credence until Greenberg himself had ceased to write about art in any regular way. The dishonest thing about it was that those who made the charge rarely, if ever, declared their own special interest in bringing it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This whole notion of a Greenbergian dictatorship, which found its way into some of the trashy obituaries that were published at his death, was essentially a phenomenon of the 1960s—an attempt, after the fact, to repeal an authority that had refused to confer its approval on artistic developments, Pop Art prominently among them, that were hugely successful but which, without this critic's support, nonetheless still lacked an unchallengeable legitimacy.

Greenberg had acquired his immense intellectual authority in the art world at a time—the 1940s and early 1950s—when the influence of his criticism was limited to the emerging artists of the New York School and the kind of people whom he described, in 1947, as "a very small circle of fanatics, art-fixated misfits who are as isolated in the United States as if they were living in Paleolithic Europe." His was, in this sense, an insider's criticism, written out of a knowledge of the life of art, an awareness of the historical situation in which modernist art found itself at that moment, and a penchant for making aesthetic distinctions that were unequaled in his generation. That was the basis of his critical authority.

He had come of age, intellectually, in the Marxist-dominated culture wars of the 1930s. His experience in that intellectual milieu left Greenberg permanently inoculated against the politicization of artistic judgment. That, too, was one of the things that was held against him when, in the final decades of his long life, it once again became chic to confer distinction upon certain artists and works of art—works of non-art, too—solely on the basis of political criteria. He had been through it all before, and he looked upon this reversion to political tests for art with profound distaste.

Against the politicization of art and criticism, Greenberg upheld the importance of what he called "aesthetic fact," by which he meant—as he wrote in an essay on Eliot in 1950—an understanding of "what works of art actually do, not so much what they mean." It was owing to his tenacious concentration on "aesthetic fact" that he achieved his eminence and influence, and in the four volumes of his *Collected Essays and Criticism* he has left us a critical *oeuvre* that will outlive the carping and incomprehension of his adversaries.

Farewell, Amadeus

We were dismayed to read in the New York papers last month that Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts seems to be abandoning its Mostly Mozart Festival. It now appears that by the summer of 1996 this popular concert series devoted to Mozart, his contemporaries, and his followers will have come to an end. By discontinuing the twenty-seven-year-old festival—which presented six concerts a week for seven weeks each summer—Lincoln Center will be shifting its attention away from the performance of great music. Attention and funds will now be redirected to theater and dance at the New York State Theater just across from the festival's home, Avery Fisher Hall.

Although the press appears to have done its level best to discover why Lincoln Center may be gutting this world-famous music series, no official answers have been forthcoming. One reason, perhaps, is that the New York Philharmonic—which under the baton of Kurt Masur has been a box-office failure at Carnegie Hall—now wishes to schedule its entire concert season at Avery Fisher Hall. But that cannot be the whole story. A more likely explanation is that the management of Lincoln Center—like the management of most of our cultural institutions these days—has succumbed to the craving for novelty and media attention. Despite its success, the Mostly Mozart Festival is no longer "news." Although it attracts large audiences who come to hear great but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

familiar music, it is not controversial, avant-garde, "cutting edge." Of course, to regard this as a *criticism* of a series founded to perform classical music is absurd. But such is the situation we find ourselves in today, when the very notion of a "classic" is widely attacked as oppressively elitist.

The problem is that great music can only remain a living presence if it is made available continuously and inexpensively. Of course older, experienced concert-goers are reasonably familiar with Mozart; of course it is these music lovers who make up a major share of the audience at Mozart concerts, as they do at concerts of other masterpieces. Merely to note that this music is beloved by already sophisticated listeners, and therefore hardly needs repeated exposure, is to ignore that there are younger listeners who have not been so fortunate. Being the products of our wretched educational system and our perverse popular culture, these younger listeners stand to lose the most when music administrators—along with their earnest collaborators, the jaded music critics—decide that it's time to use philanthropic funding to put on novelties from around the world and provocations from other, so-called interdisciplinary, art forms.

Because new people are born every day, a new audience for the classics is also born every day. Records and CDs provide a valuable resource, but they are no substitute for the culture of live performance. The Mostly Mozart Festival is one of our premier repositories of that culture, and its planned dismantling marks a great loss in the artistic life of this country.

Editor's note: Readers are reminded that *The New Criterion* does not publish in July or August. Our next issue will appear in September.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Willem de Kooning at 90

by Hilton Kramer

Fame is like a river, that beareth up things light and swollen, and drowns things weighty and solid.
—Francis Bacon, in *Essays* (1625)

No American painter of his generation—the generation that gave us the New York School—has been the object of more adulation, imitation, interpretation, and sheer unbounded admiration than Willem de Kooning, whose work is currently the subject of an exhibition marking the artist's ninetieth birthday.[1] None has enjoyed greater critical acclaim, either. Long before the public was given its first glimpse of his work, he won the support of artists and writers—among them, John Graham, Arshile Gorky, Edwin Denby, Rudy Burckhardt, and Fairfield Porter—who recognized his exceptional talent and accorded it a special esteem. In 1936, exactly a decade after de Kooning's arrival in the United States as an immigrant from the Netherlands, Holger Cahill included a work of his in the exhibition "New Horizons in American Art" at the Museum of Modern Art, which had been founded in New York only seven years earlier. In 1942—the year he met Jackson Pollock and Marcel Duchamp—de Kooning made his gallery debut in the company of Bonnard, Matisse, and Picasso in an exhibition, "American and French Paintings," organized by John Graham, and two years later Sidney Janis included the artist in his book *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*. Which was not a bad start for an artist unknown to the public, unwritten about in the press, and without connections in the world of money and fashion. The New York art world was then a smaller and more private place than it is today, and it followed a slower pace. Yet within its avant-garde ranks, which the public knew little or nothing about, de Kooning seems to have been nominated for a position of greatness almost as soon as his presence became known, and that position was confirmed—at least for the cognoscenti—with the artist's first one-man exhibition at the Egan Gallery in the spring of 1948. Writing about the show in *The Nation*, Clement Greenberg promptly hailed the "largeness and seriousness" of de Kooning's art. He straight-away placed de Kooning among "the four or five most important painters in the country," and pronounced the exhibition itself "magnificent." Six months later, the Museum of Modern Art acquired its first de Kooning for the permanent col-

1 "Willem de Kooning: Paintings," selected by Marla Prather, David Sylvester, and Nicholas Serota, opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., on May 8 and remains on view through September 5, 1994. It will then travel to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (October 11, 1994–January 8, 1995) and the Tate Gallery in London (February 15–May 7, 1995). A catalogue of the exhibition, with essays by Mr. Sylvester and Richard Shiff, has been published by the National Gallery and Yale University Press (231 pages, $55; $25 paper).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lection. The artist was forty-four, and still living hand-to-mouth, but he was already a star in what was coming to be known as the New York School.

It was in the Fifties that de Kooning's commanding reputation became a public phenomenon for the first time. For the so-called "second-generation" painters of the New York School, he was a sovereign figure, presiding over the downtown art scene with an unquestioned authority in a domain largely defined by his example and influence. Every possibility which the artists of the "second generation" wished to pursue seemed to be contained and sanctioned in his own pictorial practice. With that celebrated first solo exhibition in 1948, de Kooning had emerged as a leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Then, in 1953, he created a sensation as the champion of a new figurative Expressionism with the exhibition of "Paintings on the Theme of the Woman" at the Sidney Janis Gallery. By 1956, he had turned again to abstraction—a looser, more chaotic, more colorful mode of Abstract Expressionism than anything he had attempted in the late Forties. It was in a review of those Fifties abstract paintings, when they were shown at the Janis Gallery in 1956, that Thomas B. Hess wrote in *Art News* that de Kooning had now "replaced Picasso and Miró as the most influential painter at work today."

This claim may have been true at the time, but it was also the sign of a disaster. "The fabrication of synthetic de Koonings had become a Tenth Street industry, and one of the games people played in those days was to see how many times Mr. de Kooning's name would turn up in each month's issue of *Art News*," I wrote of this period a few years later.[2] By 1959, however, even the editors of *Art News* were moved to ask "Is There a New Academy?", and Hess spoke ruefully of de Kooning's influence having reached a "high comic point as young artists [made] whole one-man shows out of a studio idea swallowed whole from still unfinished de Kooning paintings." Except for a few dissenting voices, my own among them, the artist himself was exempted from such criticism. As I wrote in the article already cited, "The cult of personality seemed to increase in exact ratio to the decline of the artist's work." And decline it did, more and more disastrously in my opinion, as the artist lapsed into self-parody and joined the ranks of his most facile imitators. Almost as soon as de Kooning emerged, with the paintings of the 1946–1950 period, as one of the most accomplished abstract painters of his generation, he became, in effect, the chief academician of the Abstract Expressionist movement—the *chef d'école* of its decadence who would never again produce anything to equal the splendor of *Painting* (1948), *Attic* (1949), *Excavation* (1950), and the other abstract masterworks that won him his first public acclaim.

Yet no matter how weakened and mannered and parodistic the paintings became, the juggernaut of canonization persisted in accelerating its claims, and continued to do so even in the face of the debacle that overtook the man himself from the Seventies onward, when his faculties were clearly failing—first as a result of uncontrollable drinking and the quantities of valium he was taking to cope with it, and finally as he succumbed to the mental occlusions of Alzheimer's disease. One hardly knows whether to laugh or to cry as we are asked to believe that these impairments imposed no discernible disability upon the artist's creative faculties—a claim that is, in any case, emphatically belied by the vacuous character of the paintings themselves. At ninety, and despite the immense inventory of failed paintings that now bears his name, Willem de Kooning is still being presented to us as an artist exemplary in his every endeavor. Thus the tragedy of a fallen talent is rewritten to read as a triumph over adversity, and the transformation of a very limited achievement into an art of epochal dimensions continues unabated.

2 This article appeared in *The New York Times* on November 19, 1967, and was reprinted in my book *The Age of the Avant-Garde* (1973).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was not to be expected that the exhibition which has now been organized to mark the artist's ninetieth birthday would represent any change in this process of mythification, and it doesn't. The only difference is that the chorus singing his praises has been supplied with a revised libretto for its rituals of celebration. Whereas in the past de Kooning was hailed by his partisans as the pre-eminent master of the New York School, now he is exalted as a kind of honorary European master whose late works, as the English critic David Sylvester writes in the catalogue for the current exhibition, "belong with the paintings made at the same age by artists such as Monet and Renoir and Bonnard and, of course, Titian." This is only the most grotesque of the many claims advanced by Mr. Sylvester, who collaborated on the selection of the exhibition, to suggest that the magnitude of de Kooning's achievement can be fully understood only from a European perspective. He sets about this task of critical relocation in the very first sentence of his essay, which serves as the introduction to the catalogue and sets the hyperbolic tone for everything that follows.

> The Dutch masters of the seventeenth century worked at home [he writes], the Dutch masters of modern times worked abroad. Van Gogh first left Holland when he was twenty and was elsewhere for all but five of his remaining seventeen years; Mondrian first left at forty, was elsewhere for all but five of his remaining thirty-two years; de Kooning first left at twenty, has been elsewhere for all but one of seventy years.

Never mind that it was only in America that de Kooning became a serious artist, or that it was under the influence of Gorky, among others, and in the context of the New York School that the painter produced his first major works. By the time we get to the bottom of the first page of Mr. Sylvester's essay, de Kooning has been whisked in and out of New York in a fast-forward trajectory that lands him, at the top of the second page, in "a landscape by Van Goyen" (which just happens to be part of Long Island), where "the emigrant was still at home."

This is quickly followed by a brief attempt to discredit the importance of the Abstract Expressionist movement for de Kooning, while at the same time Abstract Expressionism itself is characterized as having been "not a movement like Impressionism . . . where a work by one of its leading members can easily be thought to be by another"—an observation that nicely manages to misapprehend the nature of both Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism in a single sentence. (You need only place the largely black-and-white abstract paintings that de Kooning produced in the late Forties in the company of the other largely black-and-white abstractions of the period to see the complete falsity of Mr. Sylvester's specious distinction.) The point of all this, anyway, is less to disparage the Abstract Expressionist movement in any categorical way—for you can be sure that Mr. Sylvester will return another day to praise it in the highest terms, if properly commissioned to do so—than to free de Kooning from the burden of his reputation as an American painter in order to relocate him among the European artists this critic has long upheld as his special idols—Alberto Giacometti and Francis Bacon.

Having accomplished that critical feat, which also entails linking de Kooning with Giacometti and Bacon as fellow Existentialists, Mr. Sylvester then goes on to claim that "de Kooning and Bacon and Giacometti are all somewhat in the line of Degas." Whether Degas is now to be forgiven for his participation in the Impressionist movement, where it is alleged by Mr. Sylvester that "a work by one of its leading members can easily be thought to be by another," the writer does not say. Nor does he bother to tell us if this reference to "the line of Degas" means that Degas, too, is now to be thought of as some sort of Existentialist *avant la lettre*. Of course it is all nonsense. The real "line" to be observed in Mr. Sylvester's preposterous essay is the line of hokum that certain English critics have made a specialty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of in writing about American art. Until now, I thought the prize specimen of that hokum was the monograph on Jackson Pollock (another of Mr. Sylvester's candidates for Existentialist honors, by the way) written by Bryan Robertson some years ago, but with his essay for the de Kooning catalogue Mr. Sylvester has now moved into first place. It is really a scandal for our National Gallery to have sponsored such a distorted account of our own art history.

This is not to say that de Kooning's American panegyrists have not also disgraced themselves with the whole field of contemporary art criticism by making similarly preposterous claims on the artist's behalf. In an essay for the catalogue of the current exhibition that is even longer and more pretentious than Mr. Sylvester's, Professor Richard Shiff says of de Kooning that "the artist has taken the timelessness of Zen, Existentialism, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Gertrude Stein, and whoever else circulated through the Manhattan-to-Springs art community—taken this timelessness and rendered it as ordinary as the trees left over in a back yard." He then quickly adds: "As always, de Kooning asserts the ordinary, corny view of things over intellectual, political, and social pretensions." But why, we may ask, if what really interested de Kooning was the "ordinary, corny view of things," should we attribute to him, as Professor Shiff does, some mysterious linkage with the ideas of "Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein," et al., which the artist surely never had and which, in any case, is not easily acquired by way of gossip or osmosis—the two possibilities that suggest themselves by the reference to the talk that is alleged to have "circulated through the Manhattan-to-Springs art community"? There are whole passages in Professor Shiff's essay where he seems to take it for granted that the content of de Kooning's mind bore a distinct resemblance to that of the published utterances of his friend Harold Rosenberg—itself a hilarious notion. This, in turn, prompts Professor Shiff to advance the proposition that de Kooning's painting might also have harbored some kind of "politics," though when we examine this proposition the "politics" in question are little more than a gloss on Rosenberg's ideas and are said, anyway, to have their origin in the artist's decision to escape the restrictive influence of his strong-minded mother. Thus, when de Kooning's mental life isn't made to sound like a graduate seminar in modern thought, it is placed on the couch for evidence of a Freudian family romance. This is a feat of speculative fantasy—one can hardly call it a critical method—that makes it impossible to say anything cogent or verifiable or even interesting about the art of painting as de Kooning practiced it—or, indeed, failed to practice it.

There is, to be sure, a discernible project at work in this concerted effort to press de Kooning into service as Existentialist saint or as cousin to the Old Masters. The latter point, by the way, has now ascended to a new plateau of shameless rhetorical silliness. For Adam Gopnik, writing about the current exhibition in *The New Yorker*, de Kooning now qualifies as both "the Rubens of regression" and "a cross between Frans Hals and Tom Sawyer." And not wanting to be outdone, I suppose, by Mr. Sylvester, who compares de Kooning's "drollery" to that of Shakespeare, Mr. Gopnik also alleges that the artist's late paintings are "radiant the way the songs in *The Tempest* are radiant." Professor Shiff, on the other hand, settles for a resemblance to Baudelaire because of what is claimed to be a shared interest in fashion "from costume and coiffure to gesture, glance, and smile." Does this, too, place de Kooning in "the line of Degas"? Mercifully, Professor Shiff doesn't say—possibly because what he does have to say on the subject makes de Kooning sound less like Baudelaire or Degas than like Constantin Guys, a far lesser historical eminence.

It hardly matters, however, whether we are invited to think of de Kooning as an embodiment of the deepest currents of contemporary philosophical thought or as the modern equivalent of your favorite Old

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Master or as some super-colossal combination of both—a kind of late Titian or Rubens of the Hamptons who spoke the language of Jean-Paul Sartre with a New York (read: Harold Rosenberg) accent. The point of all this is to shift the discussion of de Kooning away from the aesthetics of abstraction—specifically the abstract painting of the New York School—in order to make the *content* of all those failed late paintings the locus of the artist's true achievement. In this reading of the de Kooning *oeuvre*, the artist is scarcely an abstractionist at all. He is presented to us as, above all, a traditional figure and landscape painter even in those paintings, which constitute the bulk of the later work, in which no figures or landscapes are discernible or intended.

The exhibition that been selected by David Sylvester, Nicholas Serota, and Marla Prather for this occasion is expressly designed to support such a distorted view of de Kooning's career, for in this exhibition the paintings that established the artist as one of the masters of the New York School—the Abstract Expressionist paintings of 1946–1950—are treated as little more than a prologue to later and greater glories. Which is why, presumably, the catalogue essays by Mr. Sylvester and Professor Shiff virtually ignore the Forties abstractions and concentrate all their intellectual fire-power on a prodigious effort to transform the pictorial dross of the later paintings into something that might pass for pure gold.

For that purpose, Professor Shiff goes so far as to depict de Kooning as a painter *opposed* to abstraction. (Mr. Sylvester does the same thing, albeit more discreetly, by placing de Kooning in the company of Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti.) While acknowledging that de Kooning, in one of his very few cogent statements on the subject, once dismissed the whole role of "content" in his painting as "tiny"—"It's very tiny—very tiny, content," he said—Professor Shiff nonetheless plunges headlong into an attempt to invest the artist's later paintings with a "content" so enormous that it diverts all attention away from the fate that has befallen pictorial form in those paintings. "Of all movements, I like Cubism most," de Kooning once declared unequivocally, yet the need to remain fixated on the supposedly momentous "content" of the later paintings likewise obliges Professor Shiff to overlook the formal catastrophe that overtook the artist's work when, beginning with those vacuous abstractions of the mid-1950s, the Cubist substructure of the late Forties pictures gave way to a kind of painterly meltdown in which a lot of routine brushwork and paint splashing was made to serve as a substitute for pictorial thought. Cubism had always been de Kooning's raft and refuge in the stormy sea of Abstract Expressionist painting, and without it he was lost. But to account for that loss, you have to be more interested in pictorial form than in some fantasy about a "content" so elusive that every one of the artist's admirers is obliged to invent it for himself. And so intent are these admirers on this task of invention that they are utterly indifferent to the ghastly paradox they have imposed upon the public's perception of de Kooning's achievement—namely, that as the artist's mental faculties have progressively failed him we are asked to believe that he gave greater and greater priority to the weighty content of his art. It is only in the debased discourse of art-world advocacy that such triumphs of a failed mind are believed to be possible.

How, then, are we to account for this effort to turn a personal tragedy into an artistic triumph of world-class importance? The best attempt at an answer that I have seen is to be found in the article that Peter Plagens devoted to the subject in *Newsweek* earlier this season.[3] Mr. Plagens brings to the discussion of de Kooning's work a high degree of admiration himself—he claims at the outset that he regards the artist as "the greatest American painter since Thomas Eakins"—yet he remains a writer for whom the realities of life, as distinguished from the

3 See "The Twilight of a God," in *Newsweek* for March 7, 1994.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vested interests of the art world, still count for a lot. Thus he wrote:

> Most of the late work is held by the de Kooning Conservancy—a kind of estate before-the-fact overseen by de Kooning's daughter and sole heir, Lisa, 37, and attorney John Eastman, son of de Kooning's one-time lawyer, Lee. Prices for a 1980s de Kooning have reached $3.5 million, and a 1955 painting sold for $20.7 million in 1989. When members of the art world approach the gravitational pull of such large sums, they start blowing smoke like State Department spokesmen explaining an invasion. The tendency is exacerbated by the fact that big bucks in art derive not from millions of critic-impervious little people paying $16.95 per CD, but from a collector elite. Whispers of doubt can dissuade an important client and drive the whole market south. But chances of a crash for the late paintings will be lessened considerably if de Kooning can be established as America's one true 20th-century master.

This isn't exactly art criticism, but it tells us a lot more of what we need to know about the exhibition "Willem de Kooning: Paintings" than anything to be found in the show itself or its catalogue.

Editor's note: We wish to call attention to a new edition of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, edited by our publisher, Samuel Lipman, and with essays by Mr. Lipman, Maurice Cowling, Gerald Graff, and Steven Marcus (Yale University Press, $30; $11 paper).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Saving the appearances: Roger Scruton on philosophy

by Roger Kimball

We seem to have reached a point where if the word "real" can be used at all, then the only world which is "real" for us, as in the world in which all of us, including scientists, are born, work, love, hate and die, is the primary phenomenal world as it is and always has been presented to us through our senses, a world in which the sun moves across the sky from east to west, the stars are hung like lamps in the vault of heaven, the measure of magnitude is the human body and objects are either in motion or at rest.
—W. H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds*

The same principles which at first view lead to skepticism, *pursued to a certain point bring men back to common sense.*
—George, Bishop Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*

Near the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel warned that "philosophy must beware of the wish to be edifying." Never mind that the *Phenomenology* is itself a brilliant specimen of nineteenth-century Teutonic edification, a dense passion play culminating in Spirit's dizzy ascension to perfect self-comprehension in the sphere of *das absolute Wissen*. For anyone leafing through the pages of contemporary academic philosophy, Hegel's scruple about edification seems almost comically misplaced. "Edifying" is about the last word one would apply to professional philosophy these days. "Sterile," perhaps; "anemic," possibly; "pedantic," "supercilious," "pointless," "destructive": these are the sorts of adjectives that contemporary philosophy—with a few notable exceptions—is likely to elicit. The sad truth is that many of the most talented philosophical minds seem irretrievably absorbed in arid linguistic technicalities, ever on the lookout for sharper razors with which to split thinner and thinner conceptual hairs. Many others have succumbed to—indeed, have embraced—one or another version of contemporary nihilism: the options here are many, from the lugubrious nonsense of deconstruction to the chummy fatuousness of Richard Rorty's radical pragmatism. Aristotle famously said that philosophy begins in wonder. Today, the wonder is that anyone bothers to begin philosophy.

Of course, this isn't the whole story. Hannah Arendt somewhere remarked that in modern philosophy *doubt* typically appears in the place that *wonder* once occupied. She was thinking firstly of Descartes, who began his heroic search for certainty by embarking on the most radical program of doubt ever attempted. But her point about doubt replacing wonder was a more general one. Wonder and doubt have always been powerful motors of philosophical speculation; this is partly because both tend to disengage us from our ordinary absorption in the world. Like wonder, doubt is an efficacious solvent of complacency. It insinuates a fertile distance between us and the world: precisely the distance that philosophical reflection requires to get going. But despite this similar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ity, wonder and doubt point in opposing directions. Wonder tends to affirm what it contemplates; doubt distrusts it. Wonder has something in common with religious awe; doubt is often a prelude to repudiation. Given the skeptical temper of modernity, it is hardly surprising that doubt should overtake wonder as the paradigmatic philosophical attitude.

The trick is to nourish both, the affirmative impulse of wonder and the astringent counter-movement of doubt. Each is necessary to the mature philosophical temperament. Wonder without doubt breeds credulousness; doubt without wonder slips into aridity. It is certainly true that the intellectual puzzles that doubt promulgates—the conundrums of paradox, counter example, and contradiction—have always been an important resource for philosophy. Yet such puzzles fulfill a genuinely philosophical function only when they serve not merely as a stage for the exhibition of cleverness but also as an invitation to intellectual humility: knowing the limits of knowledge being itself a venerable bit of philosophical insight. The point is that if philosophy is to be more than a spur to our progressive disillusionment, it must have a positive dimension. Using the word in the broadest sense, we might speak here of philosophy's *ethical* dimension: its ability to address our deepest existential questions. Plato touches on this aspect of philosophy in *The Republic* when he has Socrates remind Glaucon that their discussion concerns "no ordinary matter, but the right conduct of life." Modern academic philosophy has by and large lost sight of this, which is one reason that its results so often seem pedantically irrelevant or even malevolently absurd.

Among our contemporaries, few have been more successful at maintaining a vigorous and productive balance between wonder and doubt than the English philosopher Roger Scruton. Professor Scruton is not particularly well-known in this country. He should be. He is a man of prodigious accomplishment in an irritatingly large number of endeavors. Born in 1944, Professor Scruton was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge. For twenty years, he taught philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is now professor of philosophy at Boston University. That is one career. In addition, Professor Scruton is a barrister, the founder and editor of the conservative quarterly *The Salisbury Review*, and a frequent newspaper columnist and public polemicist. He is the author of many books, including monographs on Kant and Spinoza, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, *Art and Imagination*, *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, and *Sexual Desire*. He has published three volumes of philosophical essays, a collection of his columns from the London *Times*, four works of fiction, and miscellaneous political pamphlets and books. Nor is he solely a man of contemplation. In the late 1980s, he worked courageously and effectively to aid the movements to end Communist tyranny in Poland and Czechoslovakia. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that Professor Scruton is a talented amateur musician and composer. His latest work, an opera for which he wrote both the music and the libretto, is about to open in London. The fact that Professor Scruton has recently become an avid rider to hounds adds a refreshing appoggiatura to this formidable list of intellectual and cultural achievements.

Professor Scruton's latest book—as yet published only in England—is *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey*.[1] The book is based on lectures Professor Scruton delivered at Birkbeck College and Boston University. His announced purpose is "to acquaint the reader with the principal arguments, concepts and questions of modern philosophy, as this subject is taught in English-speaking universities." *Modern Philosophy* certainly does this. Taken all in all, it is the best and most sophisticated introduction to the subject that I know.

The first thing that strikes one about the book is the breadth of Professor Scruton's

1 *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey*, by Roger Scruton; Sinclair-Stevenson, 611 pages, £25.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mastery of the discipline. Most academic philosophers inhabit a relatively small corner of their field. They are specialists: in Kant or Heidegger, perhaps, or contemporary language philosophy or theories of perception; naturally they know something about the history of philosophy and are up on some current debates, but, usually, their real expertise lies in one or two narrow sub-fields.

Professor Scruton seems equally at home everywhere, discussing with robust authority Plato's theory of forms and the intricacies of the physicist J. S. Bell's response to the Einstein, Podolsky, and Rosen objection to quantum theory. He is as conversant with the tradition leading from Brentano and Husserl through Heidegger and Sartre as he is with the work of Frege, Russell, Ayer, Wittgenstein, Tarski, and Quine. His book includes penetrating chapters on "The Soul," "God," and "The Devil" (an especially good one) as well as a section devoted to "The Music of the Spheres." When he comes to write a chapter on "Necessity and the *a priori*," Professor Scruton starts with Hume and Kant, but quickly moves on to discuss the refinements made by contemporaries like Grice, Kripke, Strawson, and Plantinga. He knows enough physics to explain contemporary philosophical theories of space and time, enough mathematics to guide the reader through the philosophical implications of Russell's paradox, set theory, and Gödel's theorem. (I particularly recommend his discussion of Russell's paradox: it is the clearest summary I have seen.)

Some of these subjects are forbiddingly technical. Professor Scruton covers them—and a great deal else besides—because he wishes to provide serious students of philosophy with a comprehensive introduction to the subject that brings them from the history of philosophy to the "frontiers" of contemporary debate. The frontiers of any subject are controverted and difficult. It is one of the great virtues of this book that it is always as clear and straightforward as its subject allows—but never more so. Professor Scruton does not talk down to his readers, simplifying issues that are inherently complex. At the same time, he never loses sight—and he never lets us lose sight—of the *philosophical* implications of the subjects he discusses. The concept of induction, for example, is a powerfully complicated thing, full of thorny logical anomalies. But at bottom it concerns a problem everyone must confront one way or another: how is it that we can make true predictions about the real world? Professor Scruton is able to show how even the most rarefied logical or semantic problem has "real life" implications. The difficulty is in unraveling those implications: "the truths that are most evident," he notes, "are also the hardest to explain."

While on the subject of difficulty, it should also be noted that Professor Scruton never indulges in technicalities for their own sake. Indeed, the excessively technical nature of much modern philosophy is itself one of his targets. "The technocratic style of modern philosophy," he writes,

> is in danger of killing all interest in the subject, and of severing its connection to humane education. Only if philosophers can rediscover the simplicity and directness of a Frege, a Russell or a Wittgenstein, so as to express the problems of the head in the language of the heart, will they really know what they are doing in the realm of abstract ideas.

Philosophy is by nature an abstract enterprise; but it remains truly philosophical only so long as it subordinates abstraction to the ultimate issues that are its real subject. Professor Scruton illustrates this with an extended architectural metaphor. "Much of analytical philosophy," he writes,

> has consisted in exercises of ontological slum clearance; demolishing the crowded tenements where gods and spirits breed. The result can be depressing, especially when the cheerful old streets with their abundance of life and mystery are replaced by regimented barracks, of Corbusian design, such as you find in Quine. We have the sense that those old gods and spirits, however dubious their ontological credentials, had something to say to us that we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> need to hear: something that cannot be conveyed in the clipped bureaucratic language of the new town-planners. Perhaps this is because there is more to the question of being—or at least other questions of being—than analytical philosophers have been prepared to countenance.

As this passage suggests, if *Modern Philosophy* is occasionally quite technical, it is nevertheless an extraordinarily lively book. This is partly because of Professor Scruton's native insouciance. It is acknowledged that A. J. Ayer's philistine classic, *Language, Truth and Logic*, should be read "if possible," but only "provided it is read *quickly* and *inattentively*." The many deceivers, frauds, charlatans, and mountebanks that populate the terrain of contemporary academic philosophy receive even harsher treatment:

> A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is "merely relative," is asking you not to believe him. So don't.

> Deconstruction deconstructs itself, and disappears up its own behind, leaving only a disembodied smile and a faint smell of sulphur.

Anyone who has caught a whiff of Foucault, Derrida, or their many epigones will instantly recognize the aroma.

Such rhetorical sallies make *Modern Philosophy* a pleasure as well as a challenge to read. But in a deeper sense, Professor Scruton's new book is lively because it invites the reader to join in a vital intellectual adventure, the discovery of truth. For philosophy, he notes, "truth is all-important, and determines the structure of the discipline. . . . Even those who believe that philosophical questions have no answers, assert this to be true; and the 'discovery' that they have no answers is made only by the attempt to find a true one."

Most books with titles like "Modern Philosophy" are *about* philosophy. What distinguishes Professor Scruton's book is that it is also a contribution *to* philosophy. He does not merely summarize other people's arguments. He engages them from within, amplifying, correcting, adding something original to the debate. In this sense, *Modern Philosophy* is a kind of *summa* of Professor Scruton's own philosophical journey. It presents, as he frequently notes, a sometimes "contentious" view of the subject. Nevertheless, it manages to be unusually even-handed, largely through the device of underscoring its *parti pris*. In the hundred-page "Study Guide" at the back of the book, Professor Scruton provides an annotated bibliography for each chapter and introduces readers to alternative arguments and positions different from those set forth in the main text. Typical is his acknowledgment that "everything that I have said in this first chapter, just like most other things in philosophy, is disputed by someone, and often on very good grounds. And if it seems at times as though I am ignoring real complexities, do not be deceived: I am." The Study Guide also teases readers with review questions and puzzles. For example, in a chapter devoted to skepticism, he discusses Descartes's classic description of an "evil demon" who might deceive us about the nature of reality. In the corresponding section of the Study Guide he asks: "Do you have an answer to the demon? If not, what do you propose to do about it?"

Professor Scruton's own position is heavily indebted to the later Wittgenstein and to Kant. Central to what he takes from Wittgenstein is the admonition that "you cannot use language to get between language and the world." That is to say (in Professor Scruton's gloss), "We cannot, in language, step outside language so as to confront an unconceptualized reality." Our concepts of the world are always just that—concepts of the world: it never happens that they transport us toward a reality and then vanish, leaving us face-to-face with a pure, unconceptualized datum. (An unintelligible thought.)

From Kant, Professor Scruton basically takes two things. The first has to do with epistemology and begins with a similarly chastening recognition of limits. But it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

proceeds to an appreciation of the *achievements* of knowledge. Both are necessary if we are to do justice to the nature of human understanding. "We can know the world only from the point of view that is ours," Professor Scruton writes, summarizing Kant's argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

> We cannot step outside our concepts so as to know the world "as it is in itself," from no point of view. Nevertheless, our concepts are shaped by the belief that judgements are representations of reality: our concepts are concepts of objectivity, and apply to the realm of "objects." Without that underlying belief we could not begin to think.
>
> At the same time, the belief in an objective order generates the idea of a world seen from no perspective: the world "in itself," as God knows it. We cannot attain God's perspectiveless view of things; but the thought of it inhabits our procedures as a "regulative idea," exhorting us always along the path of discovery.
>
> Kant's view . . . is not the last word in the matter. But it is the best word that has ever been uttered.

The second thing that Professor Scruton takes from Kant has to do with what we might call the moral resources of aesthetic judgment. He has great admiration for Kant's moral philosophy. (At one point he describes it as "one of the most beautiful creations that the human mind has ever devised.") But what seems to have had the largest influence on his own thinking is not the famous idea of the categorical imperative ("*Act in such a way that your principle of action can become a universal law*") but the way in which Kant's idea of disinterested aesthetic appreciation prefigures or gestures toward an experience of unity and completeness. "Disinterested contemplation of the world," Professor Scruton notes, "means contemplation of the world in relation to the self, and contemplation of the self as *part* of the world. . . . Such a view would explain why aesthetic experience is so gripping: we are seeking for a home in the world: not the home of the body and its appetites, but the home of the self."

Conceived of in this way, aesthetic experience is an important ally against the depredations of reductionism: the kind of ideological thinking that permeates Marxism, Freudianism, and other "isms" that attempt to recast the richness of human experience in the crude, alien terms of elementary "laws," "drives," or power relations. The verbal give-away that we are on dangerous ground are such phrases as "nothing but . . ." Love is "nothing but" a rationalization for the sex instinct; the legal system is "nothing but" a rationalization for the maintenance of bourgeois power relations; education is "nothing but" a means for promulgating the ideology of the ruling class, etc., etc. "Reductionism of this kind," Professor Scruton points out,

> does not merely involve a host of philosophical confusions. It is essentially anti-philosophical, based in the desire to simplify the world in favour of some foregone conclusion, whose appeal lies in its ability to disenchant and so demean us. The reductionist "opens our eyes" on to the truth of our condition. But of course, it is not the truth at all, and is believed to be true only because it is shocking. There is, here, a contempt for truth and for human experience that a philosopher should do his best to overcome.

What Professor Scruton is arguing against is the cherished modern dogma that the extent of our disillusionment is a reliable index of our wisdom: the idea that somehow the less we believe the more enlightened we are.

There is, however, an curious irony here. For there is an important sense in which philosophy *must* contribute to the reduction of human experience. At least, it must *begin* by contributing to it, and this for the same reason that philosophy cannot proceed without a large element of doubt. There is something essentially *corrosive* about the probing glance of philosophy: something essentially dis-illusioning. If our goal is a human understanding of the world, then the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

activity of philosophy must itself be part of what philosophy investigates and criticizes.

This brings us to the center of Professor Scruton's purpose. Philosophy begins by interrogating our everyday understanding of the world. Yet all of its fancy conceptual footwork is for naught if it does not in the end lead us to affirm a fully human world. (One crucial chapter of *Modern Philosophy* is called "The Human World.") This is the reason that Professor Scruton gives such a prominent place to aesthetic experience: its vision of completeness provides an alternative to the abstractions of philosophy and science.

It is a delicate matter. In one sense, philosophy is the helpmeet of science. It aids in the task of putting our conceptual household in order: tidying up arguments, discarding unjustified claims. But in another sense, philosophy peeks over the shoulder of science to a world that science in principle cannot countenance. As Professor Scruton put it elsewhere, "The search for meaning and the search for explanation are two different enterprises." Science offers us an explanation of the world; it may start out as an attempt to explain appearances, "but it rapidly begins to replace them." Philosophy seen as the search for meaning must in the end endorse the world of appearance.

If we had full access to that god-like, "perspectiveless" vision referred to above, then there would be no problem. The ghostly truths that science furnishes us would not only allow us to control reality but would also provide us with a world we could inhabit. The problem is that we do not, cannot, inhabit the abstract world that science describes. Reason allows us to distinguish between appearance and reality; but *our* reality turns out to be rooted firmly in the realm of appearance. "This worry is not just philosophical," Professor Scruton notes;

> it is also spiritual. The meaning of the world is enshrined in conceptions that science does not endorse: conceptions like beauty, goodness and the soul which grow in the thin top-soil of human discourse. This top-soil is quickly eroded when the flora are cleared from it, and nothing ever grows thereafter. You can see the process at work in the matter of sex. Human sexuality has usually been understood through ideas of love and belonging. . . . The sexologist clears all this tangled undergrowth away, to reveal the scientific truth of things: the animal organs, the unmoralized impulses, and the tingling sensations. . . . The *meaning* of the experience plays no part in the scientific description.

It is "naked truth": in Eliot's words: "We had the experience but missed the meaning."

This is the deep existential concern that stands behind Professor Scruton's explorations of the technical aspects of philosophy.

> The scientific attempt to explore the "depth" of human things is accompanied by a singular danger. For it threatens to destroy our response to the surface. Yet it is on the surface that we live and act: it is there that we are created, as complex appearances sustained by the social interaction which we, as appearances, also create. It is in this thin top-soil that the seeds of human happiness are sown, and the reckless desire to scrape it away—a desire which has inspired all those "sciences of man," from Marx and Freud to sociobiology—deprives us of our consolation.

Consolation? Indeed, more: it threatens to deprive us of our humanity. In Plato's phrase, philosophy turns out in the end to be an effort to "save the appearances."

We all of us inhabit a world irretrievably shaped by science; we know that the sun does not *really* move from east to west, just as we know that the stars are not *really* hung like lamps from the sky. And yet . . . Professor Scruton's point is that such truths are accompanied by other, conflicting truths. "The human world," he suggests in a note, "may be through and through the product of unscientific ways of thinking, and yet at the same time a true representation of an objective reality." As the epigraph from Auden suggests, we recognize the legitimacy of that reality—our reality—every time we wake and find that the sun, once again, has risen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Life sentences: the art of Joseph Conrad

by Joseph Epstein

Mr. Conrad has no ideas, but he has a point of view, a "world"; it can hardly be defined, but it pervades his work and is unmistakable.
—T. S. Eliot, "Kipling Revividus"

He [James] had a mind so fine no idea could violate it.
—T. S. Eliot, "On Henry James"

From T. S. Eliot, no praise for a novelist could be higher, one must conclude, than to be found without ideas. These two Eliotic quotations, along with manifold affinities, lash Henry James and Joseph Conrad together. As for their affinities, both James and Conrad were precursors of modernism in their profound contemplation upon the endless questions of form in literary creation. In the work of each writer, plot never supersedes artistic purpose and artistic purpose is never separated from moral vision. James invoked one to be a person on whom nothing was lost and, what comes close to the same thing, Conrad affirmed that, in the moral realm, ignorance is no excuse. James loved complication, and Conrad seemed unable to avoid it. Both would be out of business without the extensive use of irony. So many qualities do the two writers share that it is possible to think of Joseph Conrad as Henry James for people who prefer to read about the out-of-doors.

Neither James nor Conrad was unacquainted or unconcerned about ideas, but both felt that the important truths for artists occurred above, beyond, in any case well outside the realm of ideas. "It is impossible to know anything," wrote Conrad to his friend Cunninghame Graham, "though it is possible to believe a thing or two." James chimed in with his own negative but nonetheless equally ardent artistic credo: "never say you know the last word about any human heart," implying, what is perfectly true, that no one after all does. Both novelists swam best in the murky waters of the morally questionable. Despite their different ways of approaching their tasks, each man understood that it was the scrupulous investigation of moral questions that gave the novel both its power and its grandeur. Each was tireless in his own investigations.

"All novelists since Conrad are cads," said George Macaulay Trevelyan. One has to assume he meant by this not only that Conrad was a gentleman to the manor (and manner) born, but that he did not feel it incumbent upon him as a novelist to do boudoir patrol as the Bloomsbury writers and those who came after them had done. Something to it, perhaps, but not much more than there is to calling Conrad a great sea-writer, a reputation he labored under for many more years than he himself wished. What Joseph Conrad was was an artist to the bone, possessed of the instincts of an artist and in search of an artist's truths.

Joseph Conrad was born in 1857, the year of the publication of *Madame Bovary*, and died in 1924, two years after the publication

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of *Ulysses*. As a novelist, he sat astride two traditions, the nineteenth-century tradition of the thickly plotted novel anchored in action and adventure and the twentieth-century tradition of the novel with its emphasis on irony, on analysis, and on psychological depth. Yet Conrad insisted on his modernity. Attempting to account for the commercial failure of his early fiction to the magazine publisher William Blackwood, he wrote:

> I am *modern*, and I would rather recall Wagner the musician and Rodin the sculptor who both had to starve a little in their day—and Whistler the painter who made Ruskin the critic foam at the mouth with scorn and indignation. They too have arrived. They had to suffer for being "new." And I too hope to find my place in the rear of my betters. But still—my place.

That Conrad has arrived as a classic of English literature is nowadays scarcely cause to hold the presses for the Long Island edition. But what, precisely, his place might be has not been clearly worked out. A Pole who wrote in English, a modernist artist who believed in the most old-fashioned way in duty and honor, Joseph Conrad is the great anomaly of modern, perhaps of all, literature, the exception who proves no rule. In one sense, Conrad's place is in the line begun by Flaubert and ending with Joyce—the international line of the perfectionists and experimentalists. But Conrad is also among the chief moralists of the novel. He preferred to put his characters—and his readers—in situations of ethical bafflement and then watch to discover if their moral compasses will help them find their way home. This, too, was Henry James's *modus operandi*. Reading both writers provides superior entertainment as well as a strenuous test of one's own equipment for moral navigation.

The only child of Polish aristocrats, of the class in Poland known as the *szlachta*, that combination of nobility and gentry that made up the ruling class, Conrad was born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski. His mother died when he seven, his father when he was eleven. Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, a translator, poet, and essayist, was also a great Polish patriot, which meant, in the nature of the case, a great enemy of Russia, which held Poland under its thick and brutal thumb. Owing to his father's politics, the Korzeniowskis were sent into exile in the northern part of European Russia in 1862. This exile was especially hard on Conrad's mother, who became tubercular; Conrad's father also acquired tuberculosis, and only because of his extremely poor health was he allowed to return to Poland for the last eighteen months of his life. When he died, he was given a hero's burial, with several thousand people following the cortège to the cemetery outside of the medieval city of Cracow.

Conrad grew up under the watchful eye of his uncle, his mother's brother, Tadeusz Bobrowski, a man of much more conservative bent than his father, both politically and temperamentally, who attempted to steer the boy unto a safer path than that chosen by his father. Conrad's orphaned youth was jittery and erratic. He was an uneven student, given to illness, fits of anxiety, rebellion, cigar smoking, and awkward adolescent amorous passions. He spoke about one day becoming a great writer, a boast his classmates found laughable.

Perhaps only because the young Korzeniowski—he would change his name to Joseph Conrad in 1894—seemed such a hopeless misfit was he permitted to take the extraordinary leap, for a Polish aristocrat, of joining, at the age of seventeen, the French merchant marine. In *A Personal Record* (1912), Conrad writes that "I verily believe mine was the only case of a boy of my nationality and antecedents taking a, so to speak, standing jump out of his racial surroundings and associations [to go to sea]. . . . the truth is that what I had in mind was not a naval career but the sea."

In fact, the truth in this matter is in flux of controversy. When Conrad first presented his notion of going to sea, his tutor called him "an incorrigible, hopeless Don Quixote." Some thought that a life at sea would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teach him much-needed discipline; others that it might be good for his health. His Uncle Tadeusz, according to Zdzislaw Najder, Conrad's best biographer, saw in his going to sea the prospect for his nephew of a career combining "maritime skills and commercial activities—better still as a middleman in the huge agricultural products trade." It is known, too, that his uncle wanted him to obtain another citizenship, so that he should be out of the legal clutches of Russia. Early attempts at acquiring Austrian and Swiss citizenship both came to nought, and Conrad was eventually granted British citizenship, in 1886, when he was twenty-nine.

Joseph Conrad's career at sea spanned twenty years, from 1874 to 1894, though during this period he was actually assigned to ships for only ten years and eight months, and of this time he spent, according to Najder, "just over eight years at sea, nine months of this as a passenger." Taking a succession of maritime examinations, he rose through the ranks from second mate to captain, though he only served briefly in the latter capacity, including a crucial six-month stint in command of a steamer on the Congo that resulted in a near fatal case of fever and dysentery and the masterpiece novella "Heart of Darkness" (1899).

A most odd figure the young Conrad must have cut among his fellow seamen. Small, dandiacal in his dark suits, bowler hat, and gold-knobbed walking stick, formal, taciturn, speaking a greenhorn's English, a reader of books, obviously a man of wide culture, Conrad commanded the hard drinkers, vagabonds, and thuggish sailors who signed on for long international voyages on merchant ships. (The better class of sailor joined the Royal Navy.) Other captains and officers referred to him as "the Russian Count."

"No," Conrad would write in retrospect, "perhaps I should say that the life at sea—and I don't mean a mere taste of it, but a good broad span of years, something that really counts as real service—is not, upon the whole, a good equipment for a writing life." Yet without his years at sea, Conrad's later literary life is difficult to imagine. Life at sea, and in the ports and places to which the sea took him, furnished the perfect subject matter for a writer born to a life of permanent exile. (As Henry James wrote to Conrad: "No one has *known*—for intellectual use—the things you know.") Life at sea was the only society that he would ever really know from the inside.

Conrad tended both to demean and to idealize his time at sea, though at no time did he consider it permanent. In later life, whenever he compared life on land and life at sea, the latter was always made to seem simpler, more manly, better. At the same time, from letters and from reports of people who remembered him during his time at sea, Conrad was among his maritime colleagues a misfit, lonely and cut off from the larger European culture into which he was brought up and for which he yearned.

The incipient writer in Conrad must have felt deep frustration aboard ship. He claimed to have begun his writing life in 1890, when, at the age of thirty-three, he started writing the novel that was to be *Alymayer's Folly*. But there is reason to believe that, four years earlier, he had entered a short-story contest sponsored by the magazine *Tit-Bits* with a story called "The Black Mate." In Conrad's own, so to say approved, version, he one day spotted from the deck of his ship an outcast named Charles Olmeijer on an island in the Malay Archipelago, and four years later began, as a way to while away a holiday, his novel based on this character. Some time later he showed pages of the far from complete novel to a young, educated English passenger on a ship on which Conrad served as a mate, and because this fellow found Conrad's pages readable and interesting, he determined to persist. The writing of this novel, Conrad wrote, "was not the outcome of a need," but "the necessity which impelled me was a hidden, obscure necessity, a completely masked and unaccountable phenomenon." With the writing of the first page of *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad wrote, "the die was cast."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

More likely it was cast well before. Given Conrad's background—a greatly admired father with belletristic interests, an early dreaminess that found an outlet in reading, a youthful rebelliousness that precluded his learning a profession, the condition of exile, a deep moodiness of temperament that issued in deep reflection—there probably wasn't much else he could have done but write. Conrad would never for a moment have suggested that his becoming a writer was a matter of conscious decision or free will. "I like the worthy folk who will talk to you of the exercise of free will, 'at any rate for practical purposes,'" he wrote. "Free is it? For practical purposes! Bosh!" Then, again, Conrad's becoming a writer may have been as simple as Desmond MacCarthy once put it: "I think it was because he had seen so many things in human nature and the world that he did not wish to be forgotten or to forget, that Conrad, to our great gain, became a writer." *Almayer's Folly* was begun when Joseph Conrad was thirty-three and published when he was thirty-eight. Although Conrad would become both a smoother prose writer and one more accomplished at organizing and orchestrating his novels and stories, his view, his outlook, his vision was settled from the first. It was never to be changed, only tested, amplified, and exfoliated to its full, immensely rich complexity. This was the advantage in his beginning to write only after coming to maturity.

H. L. Mencken, an early admirer, said that, in reading Conrad, a reader "must bring something with him beyond the mere faculty of attention. If, coming to Conrad, he cannot, he is at the wrong door." To grasp anything like the full power of Conrad's fiction, one must, I think, at some point in one's life have been impressed with the utter indifference of the universe to even the most grand of human plans. One must have felt the brute fact that we both come into and go out of this world alone—and, however much surrounded by other people, nonetheless spend much time in between in spiritually this same condition of loneliness. However great one's love of justice, one must know that it is not evenly meted out in this world, nor is it ever likely to be. One must understand that good frequently goes without reward while at the same time evil is never justified and always brings its own punishment. Life must be considered a struggle, a battle, a riddle to which it may well be that nothing resembling a persuasive answer is available.

Conrad never posited any of this directly, but one can scarcely conclude otherwise from his stories and novels. Although he often alluded to his true purpose as an artist, the two most famous of his statements on the matter come from prefaces, the first to his novel *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and the second to *A Personal Record*. In the former, Conrad wrote:

> My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand—and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.

As for that glimpse of truth, in the preface of *A Personal Record*, Conrad wrote:

> Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity.

So there it is, Conrad's artistic credo, to make his readers hear, feel, and see, and after that to make plain to them, through the exempla of stories, that the world rests on a small number of ideas, fidelity notable among them. It explains everything and yet stated baldly it explains nothing. As Marlow, Conrad's narrator in "Heart of Darkness," says, "Droll thing life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some knowledge of yourself—that comes too late—a crop of unextinguishable regrets." And knowledge of yourself, self-knowledge, seems to be only available in Conrad through traumata brought about by extreme moral tension. In Conrad's fiction, characters meet the problems that moral tension sets them and through doing so acquaint themselves with glimmerings of the larger significance of life; or they avoid these problems—through insensitivity, through ignorance, through removing themselves from life—and live, outside the realm of self-knowledge, in degradation or ignominy or triviality.

For Conrad "imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life." Imagination is inseparable from language, and not the least interesting of Conrad's choices—if choice it was—was to write in English, the third of his languages in order of acquisition. He claimed himself "adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character." He went on to say that "if I had not written in English I would not have written at all."

Whatever the inevitability of Conrad's writing in English, the language was never easy for him. To add to his torments, he was a writer in the *mot juste* tradition. One must imagine in operation here the perfectionism of a Flaubert but perfectionism sought in a language not one's own. In making the corrections for *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad is said to have made more than eight hundred changes that had to do with the replacement of one word by another. His wrestle with English was endless. Everyone who met Conrad seems to have remarked on his punctilious manners and his difficult English. E. V. Lucas, the English essayist, noted that Conrad "spoke with a very strong foreign accent and in sentences not too well constructed." Edward Garnett, who was most helpful to Conrad in his dealings with publishers and editors, reported that Conrad, when reading from the manuscript of *An Outcast of the Islands* to him, "mispronounced so many words that I followed him with difficulty. I found then that he had never once heard these English words spoken, but had learned them all from books!"

One can see—one can feel and hear—Conrad's struggle with English in these two separate passages from *Almayer's Folly*:

> While the sun shone with the dazzling light in which her love was born and grew till it possessed her whole being, she was kept firm in her wavering resolve by the mysterious whisperings of desire which filled her heart with impatient longing for the darkness that would mean the end of danger and strife, the beginning of happiness, the fulfilling of love, the completeness of life.

> Dain Maroola, dazzled by the unexpected vision [of Almayer's daughter Nina], forgot his brig, his escort staring in open-mouthed admiration, the object of his visit and all things else, in his overpowering desire to prolong the contemplation of so much loveliness met so suddenly in such an unlikely place—as he thought.

That the author of these awkward sentences would go on to become a master of English prose is part of the measure of Joseph Conrad's achievement. His struggle with English would never end, never get easier, but, over the years, as he got better and better, it took place on higher and higher ground. His prose was dinstinctly his own; he struck a note that sounded like that of no one else. But then great masters—the name of Henry James once again comes to mind—teach us not only to accept but to love their original, their absolutely characteristic no matter how idiosyncratic, note. Max Beerbohm, who held both James and Conrad in the greatest regard, wrote his two best parodies of these writers. Here, from Beerbohm's *Christmas Garland*, is the perfect first paragraph from his Conrad parody:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> The hut in which slept the white man was on a clearing between the forest and the river. Silence, the silence murmurous and unquiet of a tropical night, brooded over the hut that, baked through by the sun, sweated a vapour beneath the cynical light of the stars. Mahamo lay rigid and watchful at the hut's mouth. In his upturned eyes, and along the polished surface of his lean body black and immobile, the stars were reflected, creating an illusion of themselves who are illusions.

Like the prose on which it was modeled, this passage, capturing Conrad exactly, is slightly awkward and out of beat ("The hut in which slept"), laced with surprising juxtapositions ("the cynical light of the stars"), oddly placed adjectives ("lean body black and immobile"), and impressive portentousness ("an illusion of themselves who are illusions"). Easy enough to mock, Conrad's prose became more and more elegant—and, when needed, eloquent—over the years. The opening paragraph of *Nostromo* (1904), for example, shows Conrad writing prose of a pellucidity any native-born writer of English would envy:

> In the time of Spanish rule, and for many years afterwards, the town Sulaco—the luxuriant beauty of the orange gardens bears witness to its antiquity—had never been commercially anything more important than a coasting port with a fairly large local trade in ox-hides and indigo. The clumsy deep-sea galleons of the conquerors that, needing a brisk gale to move at all, would lie becalmed, where your modern ship built on clipper lines forges ahead by the mere flapping of her sails, had been barred out of Sulaco by the prevailing calms of its vast gulf. Some harbours of the earth are made difficult of access by the treachery of sunken rocks and the tempests of their shores. Sulaco had found an inviolable sanctuary from the temptations of a trading world in the solemn hush of the deep Golfo Placido as if within an enormous semi-circular and unroofed temple open to the ocean, with its walls of lofty mountains hung with the mourning draperies of cloud.

Writing in a language he never spoke with ease, Conrad really did make us, his readers, see—and from this all else followed. As he himself put what he took to be both his problem and his task, he had "to make unfamiliar things credible. To do that I had to create for them, to reproduce for them, to envelop them in their proper atmosphere of actuality. This was the hardest task of all and the most important in view of that conscientious rendering of truth in thought and fact which has been always my aim."

Note that it is both thought and fact that interested Conrad. Perhaps this is why so much of his fiction seems, as V. S. Naipaul once remarked, "like a simple film with an elaborate commentary." By the early 1920s, Conrad, always in need of money, sold the film rights to all his novels; and many of these have been made into movies or done on stage or on television. But none has been anywhere near successful, chiefly because in Conrad it is the thought accompanying the fact that makes him—as it makes James and Proust—a great writer; and it is the thought, precisely, that the movies cannot accommodate.

In creative-writing courses, young students are regularly exhorted to show and not to tell. But the great writers have always been splendid tellers, and Conrad has been the among the best of them. "What men wanted was to be checked by superior intelligence," Conrad writes in his story "The End of the Tether," "by superior knowledge, by superior force, too—yes, by force held in trust from God and sanctified by its use in accordance with His declared will. Captain Whalley believed a disposition for good existed in every man, even if the world were not a very happy place as a whole." As Naipaul rightly notes, "by his sheer analytical intelligence, Conrad holds us." Naipaul adds: "For Conrad, though, the drama and the truth lay not in events but in the analysis: identifying the stages of consciousness through which a passionless man might move to the recognition of the importance of passion."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Most of Conrad's characters begin in a state of passionlessness. It is their want of passion that often puts them beyond the pale of normal humanity. Beyond that pale they indubitably are. Conrad gave his second novel the title *An Outcast of the Islands*, and at the center of nearly all of his fiction is an outcast of one sort or another. Sometimes one is made an outcast by conditions beyond one's control (as in "Amy Foster" or *Under Western Eyes*); sometimes one is made an outcast by greed, fantasy, or laziness (*Almayer's Folly*, *The Secret Agent*), sometimes by a will to power or pride (*Nostromo*), sometimes by moral purpose gone madly awry ("Heart of Darkness"), sometimes by deliberate philosophical decision (*Victory*), sometimes by too great reliance on irony (*Nostromo*, again).

Conrad was especially sensitive to this condition of being an outcast, for he was himself not so much an outcast by conscious decision as he was cast out of normal life by the harsh political and autobiographical conditions of his early life. V. S. Pritchett has noted that "before anyone else . . . Conrad the exile foresaw that in half a century [after he wrote] we should all become exiles, in a sense." It is by no means clear that Pritchett understood what this sense was, for in his fiction Conrad is dealing with matters much deeper than the sense of feeling like an exile inherent in the alienation, however vague or specific, that many people have come to feel at the end of the twentieth century toward their family, or culture, or country. In good part Conrad's genius resides in his taking particular cases of outcasts, specifying their situations until they become crushingly real, and while doing so—here the magic of art comes into play—elevating these particular cases into a universal condition.

The solitariness, the absolutely devastating aloneness, of so many of Conrad's central characters can send a shudder through one's soul. To be an outcast means, in the root sense, to be cast out from the wider community. In good measure, the sadness at the heart of so much of Conrad's fiction is that the surrounding community comes itself to resemble an abyss of self-deception and self-seeking. Perhaps the only relief from this loneliness in Conrad's books comes, oddly enough, in that loneliest of settings, where the universe itself seems most cruelly indifferent, the sea.

In many of Conrad's sea stories, men pull together, not merely for a common but usually for a crucial goal, as in the horrendous storms in "Typhoon" or *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, where life itself is at stake, and emerge heroic in blending their lives into a larger common purpose. As Conrad wrote in *Lord Jim*: "we exist only insofar as we hang together." I earlier quoted Conrad remarking that notable among the ideas on which the world rests is that of Fidelity. In his fiction, Fidelity is often another word for duty. Those who understand their work, stay on the job, ever faithful to their duty, these are the characters Conrad seems most to admire. As Conrad puts it in "Youth," where his narrator attempts to grasp the reasoning behind the dutifulness of the English seaman:

> They didn't think their pay half good enough. No; it was something in them, something inborn and subtle and everlasting. . . . There was a completeness in it, something solid like a principle, and masterful like an instinct—a disclosure of something secret—of that hidden something, that gift of good or evil that makes racial difference, that shapes the fate of nations.

Among the more sentient of Conrad's characters, self-knowledge is crucial to any chance not for happiness, a quality that doesn't seem to enter into Conrad's figurings, but for measured contentment. Self-knowledge, in Conrad, does not have necessarily to do with high intelligence. Once again as in the novels of Henry James, so in Conrad, great intelligence is as likely as not to lead a character to disaster: to make him more manipulative, greedy, cruel. No, what is wanted is not so much intelligence as moral sensibility. The quality of moral sensibility determines one not to harm others

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but to understand, if not quite one's exact place in the larger, otherwise utterly mysterious scheme of the world, at least to understand that one can never for a moment pretend that one is a free agent, unbounded by the legitimate claims of others. The one piece of clear, cautionary advice on this point in Conrad is given to us through the mouth of Axel Heyst, the lonely hero of *Victory*, who emerges from the philosophical nihilism taught him by his father, to report from the depths of his soul: "Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life."

Conrad meant love not in the sexual or even the romantic but in the larger sense of love of life itself. Although *Victory* is in good part a love story, and so, too, is *Almayer's Folly* a love story, while *The Secret Agent* may be the most powerful anti-love story ever written, Conrad was not a writer whose own passions were greatly engaged by the erotic. Conrad refused to read Freud, saying, "I do not want to reach the *depths*. I want to treat reality like a raw and rough object which I touch with my fingers." Zdzislaw Najder is surely correct when he writes: "I believe that Conrad opposed the emphasis on erotic themes in literature because he was convinced that it would overshadow more vital and serious problems. Among the subjects that concerned him most—responsibility, sense of duty, guilt, justice, freedom, honor, solidarity, anarchy, order—masculine-feminine affairs were not in the forefront."

Conrad was, in brief, after larger game. He sought to comprehend humankind in all its grandeur, pathos, enigmas, contradictions, and irreconcilable qualities. While sticking strictly to the particular—the true realm of fiction—he sought the highest generality. The kind of human mystery that engaged Conrad's interest as a novelist is formulated in the following, from a letter to a friend: "Egoism, which is the moving force of the world, and altruism, which is its morality, these two contradictory instincts, of which one is so plain and the other so mysterious, cannot serve us unless in the incomprehensible alliance of their irreconcilable antagonism."

An interest in the larger questions is also useful in being one sure way of escaping the entrapments of personality. "When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerading of something hopelessly unknown," Conrad wrote to Edward Garnett, "the attainment of serenity is not far off." Conrad would not himself ever attain much in the way of serenity, but his wanting to escape personality is reminiscent of nothing so much as T. S. Eliot, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," remarking that poetry—and by extension all art—"is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things."

Joseph Conrad was among those who knew. Through the publication of letters and of much biographical study, it has become evident that Conrad was what we should nowadays call a depressive. Conrad's own statement of the case for personality, handsomely stated to his friend Marguerite Poradowska, is itself put with the dark force of the depressive: "We must drag the chain and ball of our personality to the end. This is the price one pays for the infernal and divine privilege of thought; so in this life it is only the chosen who are convicts—a glorious band which understands and groans but which treads the earth amidst a multitude of phantoms with maniacal gestures and idiotic grimaces. Which would you rather be: idiot or convict?"

Conrad's view of his own writing, set out in letters to friends, publishers, and his agent (J. B. Pinker), is that of a man serving a life sentence—sentenced to the endless making of sentences. His complaints about the difficulty of composition make Flaubert's seem as cheerful as a Doris Day song. In 1894, in a letter to Marguerite Poradowska, he writes: "I am completely stuck. I have not written a single word for a fortnight. It's all over, I think. I feel like burning what there is. It is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

very bad! Worse than bad." And, to the same correspondent: "I work a little. I agonize, pen in hand. Six lines in six days." To Cunninghame Graham he wrote: "I am like a tight-rope dancer who, in the midst of his performance, should suddenly discover that he knows nothing about tight-rope dancing. He may appear ridiculous to the spectators, but a broken neck is the result of such untimely wisdom." But then most of his comments about his writing are of this tenor, ending with his comment, near the close of his life, to Jacob Epstein, who was doing his bust, that he, Conrad, "was finished." "I am played out," Epstein remembers him saying, "played out."

His own past achievements seemed to offer Conrad scarcely any solace at all. Mentally, he allowed himself no time off for work well done; there was only the torture of books still to do, prose perpetually owed to magazines and agents. "I do not dream of making a fortune," he wrote to a childhood friend in Poland, "and anyway it is not something to be found in an ink-well. However, I must confess that I dream of peace, of a little recognition and of devoting to Art the rest of a life that would free me from financial worry."

All this might have been easier had Conrad not been so wreckless with money. As a born aristocrat, he felt that he must live, even in his adopted country of England, in the expansive manner of the aristocracy, which meant living in too large houses, driving too large cars, and racking up too large bills. "I can't exist very long in this penury," runs a fairly standard Conradian *cri de poche*, "I've got some small liabilities to attend to. . . . And besides. . . ." Besides, besides, besides—there was always a besides: his wife's poor health, his children's school bills, his need to find a better place to write.

Great difficulties with writing and genuine ineptitude with finances do not generally guarantee a jolly outlook. But Conrad would probably have been depressed even without these serious barriers to contentment. The commercial success that came with his novel *Chance* (1913) did not much lessen it. His depression was not merely a habitual gloominess or a variant of the blues. It came closer to lapsing into insanity. To his agent, Pinker, he writes: "Really all these anxieties do drive me to the verge of madness—but death would be the best thing." To a friend he writes: "I must go through these depressing periods; there is no cure for them apparently"; and to another friend he adds: "Half the time I feel on the verge of insanity." To John Galsworthy, he writes: "I am trying to put off this horrid dread of the future which oppresses me. I am dispirited by that feeling of mental exhaustion of which I cannot get rid at all now. I have learned to write *against* it—that's all." Such sentences play like a threnody through Conrad's lengthy correspondence. They make one feel sorry for him. But they also make his achievement seem all the greater.

At the same time, they endanger this achievement by suggesting that the dark vision at the heart of Conrad's fiction is the result of something akin to mental illness. His art could be easily written off as so much solipsism—the egocentric projections of an all but certified depressive. Conrad himself despised such easy biographical criticism, especially of a psychologizing kind. When Edward Garnett, a Russophile and a great friend of the Soviet Union, attributed the strong distaste for Russia shown in *The Secret Agent* to Conrad's being a Pole, Conrad retorted by asking, "Is my earnestness of no account? Is that a Slavonic trait?"

Conrad reserved to himself the right granted the most serious of artists to announce a plague on both your houses when he felt that neither side in a political conflict was the right side—and the right side was that of human solidarity. Thus, in his Author's Note to *Under Western Eyes* (1911), a book which anticipates the Russian Revolution of 1917, Conrad wrote:

> The ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions. These people are unable to see that all they can effect is merely a change of names.

In a contemporary spirit of proving that the great writers of the past were less great-souled than academic critics of the present, Conrad has in recent years been taken as a racist who was on the side of imperialism for "Heart of Darkness" and as a reactionary for *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad in fact detested Belgian imperialism in central Africa for its selfishness, its brutishness, its extracting everything and leaving nothing behind but destruction and bloodshed. (As *Nostromo* demonstrates, he was no happier with American business intervention in Latin America.) He was, moreover, fully cognizant of and always made plain in his writings the foolish role that unwarranted white superiority played in distant native cultures. Kurtz's final utterance, "the horror, the horror," is precisely about how little separates supposedly civilized man from savagery when the bounds of civilization are transgressed.

For maintaining his views Conrad has been taken, variously, as a pessimist, a moral nihilist, an inept artist, a right-wing reactionary. What he was, as all great writers are, was on the side of civilization. Having lived as he did—practically born into exile, orphaned by politics, exposed to danger at sea and viciousness in strange lands, under siege his lifelong by an unrelenting depression—Conrad had a clearer view than most of the tenuousness of civilization. And yet, he felt, "some kind of belief is very necessary." His own kind of belief was complex, qualified, but nonetheless genuine. "To be hopeful in an artistic sense," Conrad wrote, "it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so."

But this doesn't mean that the artist has for a moment to believe we are close to realizing the possibility. Despite his own need for belief, his own deeply reserved but quite real hope for a different and better world, Conrad took it as his task as a novelist to show the many ways in which men and women, through their moral blindness—through conceit and vanity, selfishness and false ambition—make life harder for themselves and even for those they all too ineptly love. Yet he must have harbored a clear view of human goodness, for how else could he have so intricately known, and so potently portrayed, the manifold ways it could be betrayed? Joseph Conrad's own career is itself a stellar example of fidelity: to our moral heritage, to the perhaps impossible but nonetheless necessary ideal of civilization, to the fundamental truths we all know and choose to forget and about which he, as a great artist, determined against staggering odds to spend his life reminding us.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The best & the worst of Louise Bourgeois

by Karen Wilkin

Over the years, I've been both convinced and irritated by Louise Bourgeois's sculptures, compelled and repulsed, fascinated and enraged, often at the same time and, on occasion, by the same piece. I remember being puzzled, at her 1983 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, by the contradiction between the single-mindedness of her themes and the scattiness with which she found ways of embodying them. The range of conceptions was fairly narrow, the range of materials, both traditional and non-traditional, very wide, and the range of invention, to put it delicately, erratic. At times, Bourgeois seemed to have tapped deep wells of feeling and to have given them form in ways that made ideology irrelevant. At others, her reputation appeared to have more to do with her presentation of herself as what might be called a marginalized, victimized female artist than with any achievement as a sculptor.

It's not entirely Bourgeois's fault, of course, that her lifelong (and frequently stated) obsessions—her own sexuality, her own body, her relationship to her parents, her sense of isolation and oppression—have been claimed by feminist critics as paradigmatic of their concerns, any more than it is her fault that her longtime interest in materials as disparate as latex, wax, marble, bronze, and scavenged wood has been hailed by postmodernist commentators as a rejection of modernist practice. It hasn't hurt, mind you—although I suppose that it is churlish to begrudge Bourgeois, who is now eighty-two, the attention and recognition that she has been accorded in the past decade or so. And however modish her preoccupations appear today, it's clear that she has been obsessing about her anatomy and her lot in life since long before such female self-absorption became fashionable.

None of which changes the fact that Bourgeois is a wildly uneven artist, almost a schizophrenic one, who swings between expressive metaphor and flat-footed literalness with bewildering ease. At the Museum of Modern Art, in 1983, it was difficult to believe that the woman who made those suggestive, vertical "totems" in the late 1940s and 1950s was the same one responsible for those sleek agglomerations of sliced cylinders and swelling lumps from the 1960s and 1970s. The totems, cobbled together from scraps of wood and battered objects, were like the potent votive symbols of some impoverished, primitive culture, while the marble clusters, presumably "bi-gendered" conflations of breast and phallus with seed-pod overtones—*pace* Georgia O'Keeffe—were, in fact, more noteworthy for the morbid slickness of their execution than for their all-too-predictable imagery.

Since then, in Bourgeois's subsequent exhibitions, the same dichotomies obtained. Apparently deeply felt, thoughtful constructions that transformed banal materials into highly charged places coexisted with repellently finished marble objects that evoked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing more stirring than the commercial stoneyard. I recall my fascination with her *Articulated Lair* (1986), now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art and currently on view there, a slightly claustrophobic enclosure made of folded metal screens strung with clusters of soft, elongated biomorphic forms made of matte black rubber. The sense of place was dramatic and curiously ambiguous. The structure seemed both temporary and timeless, and what was even more odd, it suggested both a building and the body. You slipped between the folds of the "screen" and entered a narrow space defined by zig-zag walls, punctuated by pendant "organs," and thought of the permanent and the makeshift, of the architectural and the biological, all at once. But remember those cloying virtuoso marbles at Robert Miller Gallery a couple of years later—the pristine geometric forms rimmed with mottoes and questions, waving horribly lifelike little arms, legs, and hands? The first lot of these occupied a territory somewhere between a pile of dismembered china dolls and the nastier kind of nineteenth-century polychrome sculpture. (I keep thinking, too, of those creepy Victorian formal portraits of dead children, common currency in an era notable for both a staggeringly high rate of infant mortality and the invention of photography.) Bourgeois's slightly later variants on the motif substituted the hands, forearms, legs, and feet of an elderly adult for the babies' limbs, while preserving their excruciating naturalism, with all its overtones of mass production, the nineteenth-century sculpture industry, and the Academy.

The tribute to Bourgeois currently at the Brooklyn Museum, "The Locus of Memory, Works 1982–1993," does nothing to revise these impressions.[1] An expanded version of her exhibition at the 1993 Venice Biennale, it contains works ranging from the mysterious to the trivial, from the poetic to the kitschy. The full spectrum of the sculptor's capabilities is represented in this somewhat oddly selected and oddly installed show. (Word is that Bourgeois herself had a great deal to do with both the choices and how things are presented, confirming once again the truism that artists are not always the best judges of their own work.) Her strengths are evident in many of the installation-type structures, particularly the "house-front," "entrance" constructions from the late Eighties, and some of the recent cage-like *Cells*. But her weaknesses are equally evident: her self-indulgence, her apparent lack of self-criticism, and, curiously, given her seeming sensitivity to the particular qualities of a great many diverse materials, her reliance on ideas, rather than on their physical manifestations, for expression. Yet what comes through, even in the wildly self-indulgent pieces, is an evident honesty. No matter how much you wish she had found a less obvious metaphor for male-female relations than those phallus-breast clusters, there is always something whole-hearted about the work. The struggle to find images for sexuality and femaleness feels *real*. If this seems worth pointing out, it is only because it is in marked contrast to the aggressive self-consciousness of the work of a kind of male Louise Bourgeois, the British painter of fleshy "naked people" whose recent efforts packed them into the Metropolitan earlier this spring. Bourgeois's work has none of the gleefully malicious "look how naughty I can be" quality of her male colleague's, none of what might be called "Lu-*schad*-ian Freud."

Perhaps the biggest problem with Bourgeois's Brooklyn show is that it begins badly. The rather ill-proportioned dark lobby space, frequently given over to specially conceived projects, is occupied, dead center,

1 "Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982–1993" opened at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, on April 22 and remains on view through July 31, 1994. It will then travel to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (September 24, 1994–January 8, 1995). A catalogue, by Charlotta Kotik, Terrie Sultan, and Christian Leigh, has been published by the Brooklyn Museum/Harry N. Abrams (144 pages, $45; $25 paper).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by one of Bourgeois's "house-front" type constructions, a fairly intimately scaled assemblage of roughly carved wooden balls against a delimiting "wall." It's probably a good piece, but it is dwarfed by the lobby. I've seen related works in smaller, more readily apprehended spaces, where the setting became an active part of the whole, exerting pressure on the various elements to create much needed tension. But the ample and incoherent Brooklyn Museum lobby drains the sculpture of tension, so that the scattering of robust, chunky balls seems arbitrary, and the piece reads as atypically tasteful, elegant, and a little lost.

The introductory, or at least the most accessible portion of the show, a group of about two dozen drawings and a single sculpture installed in the galleries to the left of the main entrance, is similarly problematic. The most recent of Bourgeois's works on view, the sculpture and all but five of the drawings were executed this year. The theme is the spider and the spider-woman, which, we are told by the abundant text panels, is for Bourgeois a potent symbol of "the maternal principle and social intercourse." And as the artist declares, her mother, her "best friend," was as "delicate, discreet, clever, patient, soothing, reasonable, dainty, neat, and useful as a spider."

The drawings that spring from these feelings, alas, are far less engaging than this unexpected list. Uniformly executed in a stylish Schiaparelli shocking pink gouache and black ink, they fuse spider-doll-figure images into agile mannequins, distilling the particularities of each into a shorthand reference of narrow, generalized forms. When the figures (or the spiders, for that matter) are rendered more explicitly, however, they're pretty inept. Clearly it's the *idea* of spider and of woman that interests Bourgeois, not the way spiders or figures look or move or occupy space. As is often typical of sculptors' drawings, the act of rendering something potentially buildable takes precedence over adjusting that depiction to a two-dimensional surface, so that the placement of images seems arbitrary and expedient, and fails to activate the page. When some kind of coherent, organizing space is indicated, it is, as a rule, both slack and conventional. Undeniably, such drawings offer clues to Bourgeois's thinking and insights that help us to read the generalized, simplified forms of her sculptures, but in Brooklyn the cumulative effect of those two rooms full of spiky little hot pink "characters," especially since they are virtually the first thing of hers you see, is to diminish the artist rather than to enhance your conception of her achievement.

What makes things more difficult is that the drawings serve as preamble to a large and not very thrilling sculpture, installed in the last room of the suite of galleries: an oversized, mostly metal spider that completely fills the oval space. It's an awfully literal piece, with something that looks like a pair of giant knitting needles stuck into one of the "knee joints" (just in case you didn't get the connection with the artist's mother) and not much sculptural presence. Like the drawings, it seems to be more about the *idea* of spider than about expressive form, mass, or volume. It is interesting, though, to watch people enter the room, hesitating, at first, to walk between the outstretched, over-arching legs of the creature, even though there was plenty of space to pass beneath them. If you do walk through, you are rewarded. The rather uninspired, skinny-legged insect transforms itself into a schematic shelter, like the ribs of a tent, or the bones of a thorax, with a massive, cauldron-like breast-body above. It is oddly comforting to be inside the sculpture—something like being a small child playing under a grown-up's large umbrella—but the pleasure has little to do with the piece's sculptural qualities. I'm having trouble, as I write this, remembering how the legs are articulated and modulated, even when I reread my notes; what I can conjure up is the sensation of being within the delimited space.

The main part of the show, in the fourth-floor galleries, is far stronger. There is the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

usual complement of over-wrought, finely crafted bronze or marble body-part concretions, and a number of the kind of ambiguous anatomical drawings that younger artists such as Kiki Smith have gotten such mileage from. But there are also pieces that give us Bourgeois at her best. *No Exit* (1989, Ginny Williams Family Foundation, Denver) was noteworthy when it was shown at Galerie Lelong, New York, in the spring of 1989, and it looks provocative and powerful in Brooklyn. A weathered wooden staircase leads nowhere, from a loosely sketched space enclosed by folding screens, like a portable entrance hall. A pair of overscaled, rough wooden balls—actually egg-shapes, like human heads—flank the stair, reinforcing the formality of the implied action—ascending a staircase—but, at the same time, holding the viewer at bay. Occupying our normal space but rigidly symmetrical and ultimately non-functional, the stair simultaneously offers an invitation to penetrate and refuses the possibility of forward motion. The weathered surfaces of the wood clearly have a history, provoking thought about the passage of time, aging, experience, memory, the vulnerability of materials, and more.

The series of *Cells* from the 1990s, some of which were exhibited in Venice, are among the most potent works in the show. Each consists of a cage-like cubicle, furnished with objects that often seem to refer to one of the senses: a carved marble ear for hearing, a leg and an image of brutal cutting—pain made visible—for touch, mirrors and "eyeballs" for sight, and so on. There are precedents for this in seventeenth-century painting, where an apparently straightforward genre portrait—a man holding a flower or an onion, say, or playing a musical instrument, or eating a dish of beans—was intended as an emblem of smell, hearing, or taste. Bourgeois clearly makes similar kinds of allusions (as well as many others) in the *Cells*, but not as ends in themselves; the allusion is only part of the meaning of these pieces. The cage-like enclosures suggest imprisonment, isolation, detachment from the sensory, and possibly even from the sensual, world. Rather than celebrating the senses, Bourgeois seems to examine the possibilities and effects of deprivation, although whether she does so from a position of protest—as a victim—or of advocacy—as an ascetic—is open to discussion.

Old wooden doors, diagonally woven wire-mesh fencing, old industrial steel sash windows, complete with broken panes—suspiciously like the windows in the Dean Street, Brooklyn, building where Bourgeois has her studio—variously form the enclosures. Some we can look into from all sides, while others require us to peer in from fixed points of view. As in Bourgeois's work in general, the most literal of the *Cells* are the least successful; in them, the association of objects within the "cage" seemed at once random and forced, and the enclosure wall that incorporated a guillotine blade seemed, to put it kindly, a little obvious. But others allow for an enriching flux of interpretation, calling up associations as diverse as the schoolroom and the prison cell, the doll's house and the rural cabin. In *Cell* (*Glass Spheres and Hands*) (1990–93, collection of the artist), the juxtaposition of clunky wooden stools and chairs, greenish glass spheres, a padded canvas-covered table, and a set of carved marble hands is both unexpected and richly suggestive. The glass spheres—Japanese fishing floats?—seem about to evaporate, to vanish from the sturdy peasant chairs on which they rest. In any other context, the meticulously rendered marble hands would be just another of Bourgeois's ventures in the outer limits of taste, a questionable demonstration of the likeness between pale pink marble and human flesh, their combination of realism and fragmentation suggestive of some sort of mutilation. But lying on the canvas-topped table in the tiny "room," the hands become quite simply a piece of sculpture, and, by extension, a kind of metaphor for art and making. The specific formal qualities of the carving are subsumed by the role of the marble hands and forearms, as a version of a found object, in relation to the whole.

These pieces depend upon what Michael

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fried calls "theatricality." Bourgeois's constructions wait for the viewer to attach meaning and associations to what are, often, essentially neutral and not particularly expressive objects in the sculptural sense. That is to say, the way elements touch, the way forms are articulated in space, the way the structure meets the ground plane are not of primary importance. The object is, in itself, passive, mute; given Bourgeois's statements about the role of women, this is quite possibly deliberate, of course.

Despite this, however, intention is not what determines the success or failure of Bourgeois's work. Associative power, no matter how rich, is not enough to rescue a visually unsatisfying work, any more than the sheer technical excellence of the "mechanically" carved marbles is enough to redeem them from emotional vapidity. By themselves, the most edifying association you might make with, say, the fiercely naturalistic marble hands would be with Rodin's fragments. (If nothing else, the slippery surfaces of Bourgeois's body parts would serve to emphasize the roughness and directness of Rodin's modeling.) But context and placement, in *Cell* (*Glass Spheres and Hands*), effects a transformation of this essentially trite image of the artist's body. Something similar occurs in *Cell II* (1991, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh), where virtually the same gnarled, clasped hands and forearms are placed on a mirrored table top, beside a collection of empty bottles of Shalimar perfume; the hands are again transformed, reading less as a ghastly, sentimental bit of statuary than as a surrogate self-portrait, a fragmented icon of mature femininity.

What else is outstanding? *Le Défi* (1991, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York), a giant blue packing crate on wheels, fitted out with glass shelves and lined with rows of glass objects: decanters, jars, wine flasks, laboratory vials, and the like. The play of light on the rows of clear glass is seductive, the metaphor for fragility and peril, effective. Curiously, among all the recent pieces, this is the one that reminds me most, in spirit, of the Fifties totems, which remain some of my favorite of Bourgeois's works. In these ramshackle constructions, the artist threaded chunks of found and recycled wood onto vertical supports, sometimes painting them, sometimes not, to form lively, insistent little "figures." These columns of angular chunks of wood forcibly remind you of how they were made, with the almost random repetition of a single action. The repetition wasn't wholly random, of course, any more than Pollock's pours were random, or than Bourgeois's own gathering of glass objects in *Le Défi* was random, but depended upon choice, upon accumulation, repetition, and organization according to intuitive notions of likeness and unlikeness.

The work of Bourgeois's erstwhile colleague, Louise Nevelson, comes to mind, in relation to these principles. There are other similarities, as well. Like Bourgeois, Nevelson was often best when she was improvising, scrabbling, before success permitted her virtually unlimited access to materials and to whatever technical extravagances seemed desirable. When Nevelson constructed her walls with scavenged, worked-over debris, with elements that had a visible past despite their new context and the unifying black (or white) paint, she made some of her best sculpture. Once she stopped combing the streets for her materials and started ordering new doorknobs by the gross, or endless numbers of crisply turned spindles, or elegantly carpentered boxes to put them in, her work lost a good deal of its edge. The evidence of Bourgeois's saccharine marble sculptures suggests that she, too, can succumb to a failure of rigor in the face of limitless possibilities; the *Cells*, which seem improvised, made of whatever was at hand, but which also incorporate rather elaborately "manufactured" elements, like the marble hands, suggest that Bourgeois is finding new ways of using a wide variety of forms, of exploiting processes and objects that have resonance for her, without losing the qualities that distinguished the best of her early work.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The catalogue of "The Locus of Memory" is a very curious document indeed. It is abundantly illustrated, but there isn't quite the coherent relation between what is illustrated and what is in the exhibition that you expect in a publication that purports to document a particular show. (I suppose I am slightly prejudiced by the cover's reproducing, in full color, one of my least favorite rose-marble baby's-leg sculptures, one bearing the extraordinarily subtle message, "Do you love me? Do you love me?") The catalogue texts are even more peculiar. There's a clear-headed, intelligent essay by Charlotta Kotik, "The Locus of Memory: An Introduction to the Work of Louise Bourgeois," and two rather more predictable, admiring essays in the most up-to-the-minute mode, Terrie Sultan's "Redefining the Terms of Engagement: The Art of Louise Bourgeois" and Christian Leigh's "The Earrings of Madame B . . .: Louise Bourgeois and the Reciprocal Terrain of the Uncanny." But then there is a whole section of statements, starting with one by the artist herself, who has never trusted her work to get her meaning across unassisted, and a raft of testimonials from the (mostly) famous and besotted: Lynne Cooke of the DIA Foundation, Jenny Holzer, Arthur Miller, Adrian Piper, Richard Serra, and others. As I said, it's odd.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Four early poems
by W. H. Auden

W. H. Auden (1907–1973) was quite explicit about the origin of his poetic vocation. In "Making, Knowing and Judging," a lecture he delivered at Oxford in 1956, Auden recalls that he decided to become a poet "one Sunday afternoon in March 1922" because "a friend suggested that I should." At that time Auden was fifteen years old. For the next six years he served a studious apprenticeship, reading, absorbing, and, especially, imitating poems by other writers.

To be sure, the apprenticeship had its caesurae. When Auden was at the Gresham's School, he once threw his poems into the school pond, declaring that he was done with poetry and that "the human race would be saved by science." It was a dramatic, school-boy gesture, quickly repented. That same evening he somehow managed to recover the poems and, forgetting about the salvific properties of science, went on writing new ones.

Technically, Auden's first book of poems was published in 1928. It was dedicated to his friend Christopher Isherwood and was hand-printed by Stephen Spender (in collaboration with a local Oxford printer) in an edition of about thirty copies. These were duly distributed to friends. But Auden's real debut came in 1930. That year saw the publication in *The Criterion* of *Paid on Both Sides*, a ferociously difficult poetic drama that Auden subtitled "A Charade," and, a bit later, a slim volume of poems (including *Paid on Both Sides*) by Faber & Faber.

Today we think of Auden as one of the great prosodists of the twentieth century. How often he insisted—to the disgust of those who have wanted to see poetry as a quasi-religious struggle for authenticity—that technical matters formed one of his chief interests in poetry. He was quite blunt about this: "Here is a verbal contraption. How does it work?" Among the questions he would have liked to put to critics:

> "Do you like, and by like I mean really like, not approve of on principle:
>
> 1. Long lists of proper names such as the Old Testament genealogies or the Catalogue of ships in the *Iliad*?
> 2. Riddles and all other ways of not calling a spade a spade?
> 3. Complicated verse forms of great technical difficulty, such as Englyns, Drott-Kvaetts, Sestinas, even if their content is trivial?"

The technical side of Auden's poetical character was present from the beginning. Above all, the young Auden was a prodigious literary magpie. As Katherine Bucknell notes in her informative introduction to the first complete edition of Auden's *Juvenilia*,[1] "He looked for examples everywhere and

1 The poems that appear here will be published in *Juvenilia: Poems, 1922–1928*, by W. H. Auden, edited by Katherine Bucknell, forthcoming from Princeton University Press. © The Estate of W. H. Auden

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imitated everything he liked." There were the astringent simplicities of Frost, Hardy, and Edward Thomas; the richnesses of Shakespeare; the sonorities of Keats and Hopkins. Eliot in 1926 and the later Yeats the next year came as world-shattering revelations. (Auden enthusiastically rated Yeats's poems from *The Tower* an "α+.") Even Edith Sitwell, alas, left her mark.

Auden digested them all, toyed with their poetical *personae*, discarded much as he struggled toward artistic maturity. The approximately two hundred surviving poems written between 1922 and October 1928, when Auden left England for Berlin, are an inventory of tried-on styles and mimicked voices. "In imitating his Master," Auden wrote (identifying his own early "Master" as Thomas Hardy),

> the apprentice acquires a Censor, for he learns that . . . there is only one word or rhythm or form that is the *right* one. The right one is still not yet the *real* one, for the poet is ventriloquizing, but he has got away from poetry-in-general; he is learning how *a* poem is written. Later in life, incidentally, he will realize how important is the art of imitation, for he will not infrequently be called upon to imitate himself.

Many of the poems collected in *Juvenilia* betray false or incomplete starts, uncertain development, and various failures of taste and tone. There are repetitions, as an image or phrase is amplified, enhanced, transmogrified, stored away for later use. (Readers will note that the comparison of eyes with "unwashed jewels"—an image that Auden adapted from *King Lear*—occurs in two of the poems printed below.) There are also some remarkable successes, and near-successes. Edward Mendelson, Auden's literary executor and one of the poet's most devoted commentators, identifies "The Watershed" (1927) as the first poem that Auden wrote entirely in his own voice. Many of the poems collected in *Juvenilia* introduce us to aspects or elements of that emergent voice.

The four poems printed here, written *circa* 1926 and 1927 (the exact dates of composition are somewhat conjectural), come from what we might call the mature period of Auden's poetical immaturity. Only one—"Aware," a metrical *hommage* to Gerard Manley Hopkins—has been previously published (albeit in a shorter version). Written when he was a student at Christ Church, Oxford, these poems display Auden's intense if short-lived obsession with the high modernism of Eliot and the later Yeats. They are dense poems: haunting but difficult, elusive, sometimes downright obscure, though memorably so. Writing about this phase of Auden's career, Mr. Mendelson has usefully noted that "the poems suggest that they are fragments of a larger whole but do not provide enough data to identify that whole. The reader is made to feel that some vital clue is lacking which, if one had it, could make sense of everything. But Auden hid nothing." The central clue is simply that the difficulties and tensions these poems embody are an integral part of what they are all about.

—*RK*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Encounter

Nothing will come of nothing
—Lear

Dark struggles broken westward. Men blink out
With eyes like unwashed jewels at the dawn,
Stale from a night of joy. Rain falls for miles
To dash itself against a stone.— To-day!

Now thoughts begin to piece themselves together
Like window-breaking on a film run backwards,
Between the earth's legs mind throws back the sun,
Grows roots again to watch dusk go, and you.

The bald fells crested with a hopeless sunset
See no two atomies whose paths cross but
Who do not stop. Day goes its road to ruin;
It makes no comment on the eyes of men,

It sees that nothing happens. No expectation
Died slowly of exposure on a dial;
No courage gulped, no looks averted from
The ragged ends of overdrawn farewells.

No mutual consciousness whipped pulses up,
Till creeping fingers touched, wrenched limbs together.
So Love was stifled 'twixt a pair of sheets
And thrust out like a bottle turned stone-cold.

Heroes have fallen into vats and stewed
And men drunk up their beer unknowing. Birds
Stir orchestras to rhythm. Unsleeved arms lend
Stone precision. None speak to them about it.
Nor shall a sign be given you that once
You made a day less mortal than its fellows.

Winter 1926–27

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quique amavit

'Amo!' Four walls constrict great purposes
To vex themselves, Halve the halved moment, keen
To rap out 'Hold!' (The tune congeals) display
Amo not yet complete Amavit, fresh
Amo condensing out of silence. Tune
On unstopped ears bursts frantically again;
Horizon marches, Future is coming You,
Your cheek's arisen overwhelming arc,
And You a nailbreadth or a pulsebeat hence

You here? Which you? As lids unclose, the You
Crushing a cigarette-end in a saucer,
You in a kitchen, drinking, wet with snow,
Confound the present You. Past is not yours:
Alone, I found the sheep skull in the grass,
Alone, amazed by death, life passes like
The flashing train, thaws Time to evening thoughts—
I said 'Good-night!' and hid them. This and This,
Once alien, are acquainted, lacking You.

Good-night, good-night! Desire has lost its way,
Aimless for faces rather there than here,
And vows are episodes; what is, is I.
As listless as a child, playing alone
On darkened afternoons, I hear the wind
Driven across the ignorant sea, the ground,
To hurt itself on panes, on bark of elm,
Where sap unbaffled rises, being Spring.
'Quique amavit cras amet'—So thoughts
Draw circles round a name, worshipping air,
Divine the world's end round the corner, breast
The hill "θάλασσα" ready on the tongue,
Snap at the dragon's tail, astonished yelp.

March? 1927

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Aware

Happiness makes us base
—Marston, *Sophonisba*

Bones wrenched, weak whimper, lids wrinkled, first dazzle known,
World-wonder hardens as bigness, years; brings knowledge, you.
Rank presence-smell a rich mould augurs for roots urged,
Eased by mucous tenderness, to absorb the Word
Which was before began; flesh-dough suffills to spilling
Concave of spirit—so you here I have: but gone,
The soul is tetanous; gun-barrel burnishing
In summer grass, mind lies to tarnish, untouched, undoing,
Though body stir, hand hold a spade, leg lever ground,
Sweat trickle down to loin; these, squat as idols, brood
Infuriate the fire with bellows, blank till sleep
And two-faced dream—'I want' voiced treble as once
Crudely through flowers till dunghill cock-crow, crack at East.
Eyes, unwashed jewels, the glass-floor slipping, feel, know Day,
Life, stripped to girders, monochrome. Deceit of instinct,
Figure, feature, form, irrelevant, dismissed,
Ought passes through points fair plotted; and you conform,
Seen yes or no. Before which argument my buts are imprudent.

May 1927

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bach and the lady

Do not sneer, stranger, if one by one,
The crowd who followed her are gone
To strangle their own shadows, or lie
Bitterly with a harlot. I
Have heard in a Bach fugue some phrase,
Perplexed with flowers and sunlight, wake
The green-leaved morning to her praise;
More generous, pitiful than we
However casual may be
The comment that her shoulders make.

May 1927

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art

After Judd: notes at season's end

by Jed Perl

An artist imagines a kingdom, builds it from the ground up, and invites us to explore the sights, take in the view. There have been times when artists formed alliances with real princes and kings, and imaginary kingdoms came close to being realities—Bernini's Rome is perhaps the most famous example. More often, however, the most that even a great artist can hope for is to present us with the pieces of that imaginary kingdom: paintings, sculptures, drawings that represent partial views, particular sights. Since the beginning of the Romantic Age, all the artist's kingdoms have been shattered and fragmentary, and the fascination of the artist's studio has been that it has seemed to be not only a workplace but also a place where lucky visitors could get a glimpse of the kingdom to come. Who doesn't enjoy looking at photographs of artists' studios? The details that a photographer picks out—arrangements of brushes and palettes and paints, the jumble of objects ranging from things of no particular value to things of enormous value—have some of the revelatory power of the little scenes on the stained-glass windows and stone capitals of the cathedrals; they enable us to grasp the nitty-gritty of artistic creation, the process of building a kingdom, brick by brick, stroke by stroke.

The solo show is a cleaned-up, public version of the scene in the studio. Going into a show, we hope to see a new kingdom under construction or nearing completion or—sometimes—complete. That the shows are up for a matter of weeks gives the remarkable ones a poignancy. They're fleeting kingdoms.

The public's desire to see what's going on in the studio is reflected in the not infrequent inclusion, in gallery announcements and catalogues and magazine articles, of photographs of the artists' workplaces. The opulently designed catalogue for Philip Taaffe's recent show at the Gagosian Gallery's downtown space on Wooster Street includes a number of photographs of the studio. (David Seidner, who took the photographs of Taaffe's paint tables, fills his images with light so that the studio looks like a place that the gods smile on.) Taaffe is an artist with an authentic decorative impulse and he is not wrong to imagine that decoration sometimes transcends decoration when presented on a very large scale, but there's still no way of getting around the fact that his paintings are too big. Although Taaffe has an intuitive grasp of the charms of Byzantium, his Middle Eastern arabesques have none of the point and intensity of the originals, and multiplying one's lack of intensity is not a way to create intensity. The studio photographs suggest an artist who proceeds with a craftsmanlike deliberation and restraint. Taaffe's paintings are in part collages, with individual elements that he prints from blocks then affixes to the canvas to create repeating patterns. By contrasting hard-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

edged collaged elements with scruffier painted areas, Taaffe manages to get several layers working against one another in these moodily, almost metallically colored paintings. Taaffe gives a gallery-goer something to look at, but it's not much more than offbeat wallpaper. His repetitions don't have enough surprising twists and turns—there's no mystery woven into these evenly accented designs.

The catalogues that are being published by the Gagosian Gallery are luxurious; they bring to mind the way that artists such as Schnabel and Salle (who now shows at Gagosian) were presented in the Eighties. Gagosian's Wooster Street space is palatial and could make any group of paintings look, at least temporarily, like a sight for sore eyes, yet the unforgettable sights can crop up just about anywhere. That ought to be obvious, and maybe even the most glamorous artists who came up in the Eighties understand that the airplane-hangar-sized gallery is only a stunning stop-gap measure. David Salle's long-running fascination with Watteau—he includes a Watteauesque figure in at least one of the paintings inspired by Fifties advertising that he showed at Gagosian over the winter—suggests a taste for intricate, intimate scale that's somewhat unexpected in this artist. Salle himself, in a 1987 interview, spoke of "Watteau, who for me is a divinity." Salle described Watteau's work as "the social kind of painting"; and he may feel that an allusion to Watteau makes sense in the context of the "Early Product Paintings" because the guiding motif, which is Fifties household products and packaging, suggests the texture and coloration of a lifestyle that's pretty much going if not gone. What Salle must admire in Watteau is the improvisatory genius that he brings to his scenes of conversation, music-making, and love-making. In Watteau, the absolute monarch is becoming a thing of the past—Versailles is Endgame—and relationships are moving into new, uncharted areas. In *Gersaint's Shopsign* the lovers and connoisseurs go about their business, while the portrait of Louis XIV, who'd died a few years earlier, is slid into a packing crate. The metaphor has some resonance for Eighties artists worried about how they're faring in the Nineties. The message is: when your reign is over, you're put in storage.

If you intend to knock a contemporary artist for his grand ambitions, Donald Judd, before his death in February at the age of sixty-five, would have made a nice big target. That was, apparently, how David Salle felt when, in a singularly bitter and vituperative interview published in the fashion magazine *W* last October, he spoke about himself as one of "us has-beens," and asked, "Why has my generation of artists been criticized for success while others have not?" If David Salle could live the last fifteen years over again, he said that he would come back as a bulldog. Apparently as a bulldog that doesn't like Donald Judd. Salle's attack on Judd gives an interesting sense of what one king-sized art ego of the Eighties thinks about a king-sized art ego who came up in the Sixties. He says of Judd's work, "It's *House and Garden*," referring no doubt to the spare, elegant rooms in Judd's various homes in Texas and New York that often made it into the lifestyle magazines; but hasn't it occurred to Salle that he's been in the lifestyle magazines, too? Salle gets very worked up about the Chinta Foundation, which Judd set up in Marfa, Texas, near the Mexican border—it's a 350-acre complex, with interesting, simply designed buildings full of Judd's pared-down constructions (and work by artists he admired, such as John Chamberlain and Dan Flavin). Salle says, "People talk about that place only in glowing terms. No one talks about it as a supreme folly of ego and an unbelievable waste of money. He has built a Xanadu in the most egomaniacal way imaginable. And they talk about it as noble and pure and valid. This is from a guy who makes boxes and who is selling a holier-than-thou lifestyle."

Each of Judd's New York gallery shows had an austere power. Then he saw his work

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turned into banalities in the indifferent installations in museum galleries devoted to contemporary art—"disembodied spatially, socially, temporally," was how he described those installations. And then, in Marfa, Judd turned the pipe dream of an artistic empire into a way-out-West reality. Judd's particular combination of radical asceticism, purist elegance, big-city knowingness, and frontier independence wasn't calculated to endear him to a lot of people. He was a valuable art critic (mostly in the Sixties) and he wrote a sort of plainspoken prose that is characteristic of American aesthetes (Gertrude Stein, for example). If one has happened to wonder why Judd's death has not inspired many encomiums, one need only read some of his writings of recent years, in which he takes an ain't-nothin'-out-there attitude toward the rest of the art scene. In 1985, he wrote a piece for *House and Garden* (maybe Salle remembered it) about his hopes for the Marfa project and observed that "in contrast to the prevailing regurgitated art and architecture, I think I'm working directly toward something new in both."

David Salle is nobody's fool. He knows that every artist has thoughts of a pleasure dome, and he knows, from personal experience, that a lot of people would be delighted to see another artist's Xanadu sink under the waves. Judd may be a natural target right now (or may have been before his death) because he confounds so many assumptions. His interest in Russian constructivism and his radical democratic politics appealed to people who couldn't countenance his art-for-art's-sake stand, while his evident success in raising large sums of money for pet projects confused those who were sympathetic to his asceticism and high-mindedness. In his last decade, Judd exhibited in New York with Leo Castelli, Paula Cooper, and the Pace Gallery (among others). All these changes in venue may have reflected the calculations of a man who knew how to make a deal, but they also presented the artist interesting opportunities to make what he could of different spaces: Castelli's deep, big ground-floor Greene Street space (which is now, as it happens, Pace's downtown outpost), then Paula Cooper's more modest quarters, and finally Pace's big Fifty-seventh Street digs. In each exhibition the individual works turned out to be far less interesting than the magnificent sense of size, scale, and interval that Judd brought to these one-man shows that were more like total environments. His is a small true achievement that is unimaginable without its enormous actual size. In his gallery shows he gave a purist eloquence to commercial spaces.

It was Donald Judd who, in a 1965 essay called "Specific Objects," defined the emergence of a new kind of art that was "neither painting nor sculpture." In the essay, which was published in *Arts Yearbook 8*, Judd discusses Dan Flavin, Claes Oldenburg, and a number of other artists and announces that "actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface." Judd sees a new freedom in this "three-dimensional work"—because its limits aren't set, something new can be made. He's glad to be done with "the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors." Judd's article is probably the most eloquent argument ever made for the break with both painting and sculpture that defined the last campaign of the avant-garde. This campaign dominated New York through the Sixties: its impact can still be felt some thirty years later. The ever-increasing size of Judd's work was an inevitable result of his belief that there were no metaphors in art, that specificity was all. If he could not evoke dream kingdoms metaphorically, he would have to build them at actual size, which is what he set out to do in Marfa. Behind Judd's avant-gardist stance there is probably a very basic desire to reunite painting and sculpture with their old master, architecture. Judd is too much the modernist to quite admit to a quest for a lost completeness, but near the Mexican border, using adobe and other more or less local materials, Judd was finding ways to give his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

specific objects a historical dimension. There's a canny elegance to Judd's Americanness; staying close to the land, he comes up with a use of materials that's so evocative it's metaphoric, even as it permits him to avoid the idea of metaphor, which for him is anathema.

I think that Judd could successfully do without metaphors, but that is very rare. Purism has always been a difficult value for artists to maintain, and it seems well nigh impossible today. The only younger artist in New York who's able to do anything much with purism is the painter Andrew Spence. *Cover Up* was the best painting in his show at Max Protetch last fall. It's a vertical canvas with several hard-edged orange zigzags filling the white space. Unlike many of the artists who were associated with the Neo-Geo label a few years ago, Spence has a feeling for surfaces: he gives paint some weight and density. The very simple shapes in these paintings are based on patterns gleaned from the man-made world. The found forms—which in the past decade have included the contour of a curvilinear chair and a pattern of crosswalks and other traffic markings on an asphalt street—recall Ellsworth Kelly's elegant use of similar shapes. These motifs are realistic puzzles that give the pictures a subversive metaphoric meaning. That's Andrew Spence's Eighties twist (and, thinking of Kelly, also his Fifties-nostalgia twist) on classic purism. Even if gallery-goers can't get the references (and frankly I don't see how they can without some prompting) they can enjoy the paintings as eccentric emblems.

Judd's idea of the specific object still carries considerable authority. But in the Nineties, when "downsizing" is a term used to describe aesthetic as well as economic conditions, the objects are flyweight—next-to-nothing (a scrap of paper, a bit of cloth) tacked to a gallery wall. At hip downtown galleries like Tom Cugliani, Wooster Gardens, and 303, something is always on the verge of slipping into nothing and literalness looks like a sorry thing indeed. Small specific objects have a pathos about them, and that's anti-Judd.

Bill Jensen's first show at the Mary Boone Gallery was in the fall, and it was unlike any other show that has been seen at 417 West Broadway. The space is by now almost a relic of SoHo's first imperial period, a period when New York artists imagined (not without reason) that they would control the world. Now Jensen enters, a mystic who came of age among the imperialists and wants to suggest to one and all that the best journeys are the interior journeys. Jensen exhibited only six paintings at Boone—the largest dimension was forty-four inches—and his idea seems to have been to catch a gallery-goer's attention by demonstrating how the imaginative scale of the paintings could counterbalance the absolute size of the gallery. Jensen's show was so minimal, it could have been taken for a Dadaist event, yet because the paintings were dense and compelling, the artist's imaginative kingdoms stood their ground. Jensen's gradual evolution toward a more forthright kind of abstract landscape has had some impressive results among the recent paintings, especially in two that are dominated by distant mountains that might be Chinese or Sienese. The darker vertical painting is *Terre Verte*, the somewhat smaller and much brighter horizontal one is *Untitled (with Yellow)*. Though *Terre Verte* depicts a distant, melancholy place, there's a realness to the space that's a relief after all the gothic surrealness of the Jensen landscapes of recent years.

The exhibition at Boone was about as impersonal a presentation of the work as one can imagine Jensen approving. Interestingly, it did bring to the fore some cool currents that run through his painty Expressionism. But it was not hard to understand why, four months after the Boone show, when Jensen exhibited his drawings in Joan Washburn's beautiful small space on Fifty-seventh Street, he chose to do so in the most intimate, casual way possible. Having two solo shows in New York City presented Jensen with an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unusual opportunity to try different things, to see how best he could bring the work before the public. By exhibiting a large number of his drawings without frames, glass, or mats, Jensen gave gallery-goers an experience that was an only slightly more straightened-up version of the experience of seeing drawings in the studio. For somebody who'd never been in an artist's studio, this was fairly close to being there. (And yet one knew that the casualness of the drawings tacked to the wall was a gambit, a ruse.) The dreamy light filtering down through Washburn's skylight pulled together the magic. It was an installation as informal as a lot of the studio shots that one nowadays sees in the fancy catalogues. Most of the drawings were done in washes of ink, with the sheets given a silvery, layered effect by Jensen's method of blotting off much of each layer of ink and then working back into the drawing. In these beautiful, highly varied pages, the artist is an explorer who makes up the landscape as he moves through it. The result —with rocks turning into clouds and oceans melting into the sky—is a terrain that is nothing but the sum of its ambiguities. On one wall, Jensen arranged a selection of small drawings done in pencil, near-doodles that are among his strongest and simplest graphic works. They include podlike or weblike or mazelike shapes that turn in on themselves with some of the frank yet mysterious beauty of Möbius strips.

If there is something in Jensen that connects him back to Judd's specific objects, it is that in Jensen the immediacy of the paint surface and the very small size of the paintings suggest a kind of specificity. Smallness is an overriding characteristic of the work. And, strangely enough, it may be that Jensen's smallness is what relates his work to the largeness of an Abstract Expressionist picture. Both Jensen and the Abstract Expressionists deal with size as an extreme statement: thus they force a viewer to think, first and last, of the totality. But everything that Jensen does inside these canvases explodes the specificity in favor of metaphor and magic, tangled landscapes leading to castles that are as craggy as mountain tops.

After the Jensen show, Mary Boone mounted a small retrospective of works by David Salle—it was up at the same time as the show of recent Salle paintings at Gagosian. Salle's paintings are a natural in Boone's overscaled space: their inflexibility and lack of depth can stand up to that room. The Salles of the Eighties may have first struck people as a reaction against the pared-down aesthetic of artists such as Judd (and a return to the collage sensibility of Johns or Rauschenberg; Rauschenberg is clearly a major influence on the recent Salles). Judd certainly didn't care for Salle; in 1984 he wrote about Salle and a number of other much-talked-about Eighties artists that "they rate from zero to one on the Richter scale." (In his recent remarks about Judd, Salle returns the compliment.) Yet a decade after Salle's emergence, it's possible to see that his paintings—with their overwhelming size, joining of basically one-color panels, and striking juxtapositions of disparate elements and materials—are, if not tricked-up Judds, then tricked-up descendants of Judd's specific-object idea. In one painting, *My Head* (1984), Salle includes a huge expanse of plywood that cannot but evoke Judd's transformation of the most ordinary of lumberyard materials into sensuous objects. *My Head* also includes a couple of quotations from drawings by Watteau. No wonder David Salle has a bone to pick with Judd. Perhaps Salle imagines that if he weren't forever competing with those specific objects, he might have a chance to compete with Watteau.

Exhibition notes

"American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885–1915" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. May 10–July 24, 1994

Some day, perhaps, we will once again be allowed to look at pictures as pictures—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

works of art created out of the desire to express an aesthetic idea. But to judge from the latest exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, that day isn't going to come soon.

"American Impressionism and Realism" is a show that anyone with a taste for these two episodes of American painting will very much want to see, as it contains marvelous works by some of this country's greatest artists—George Bellows, Mary Cassatt, William Merritt Chase, William Glackens, John Singer Sargent, John Sloan, and John Twachtman. The show's organizers enlist them in an effort to persuade us that, in spite of everything we've been told so far, American Impressionism (concerned with capturing the fugitive effects of light and atmosphere) and Realism (committed to recording the gritty realities of urban living) aren't really very different from each other—that in fact they share a number of similarities beyond mere painterliness. The primary tool used to effect this fusion of oil and water is the "new" art history, in which works of art are interpreted in terms of social and political concerns. Industrialization, class conflict, and urbanization are the lenses through which we are asked to view the works in this exhibition.

Take, for example, William Merritt Chase's *The Lake for Miniature Yachts* (1890). It is an image of the boat pond in Central Park, boldly composed on a diagonal so that the concrete pavement surrounding the pond takes up a good half of the picture. These compositional strategies—the strong diagonal, the focus of the action off to one side, the large expanse of sun-dappled foreground—come straight out of the work of Edgar Degas. But not for the organizers of this show. No, for them the painting is a statement about the encroachment of "artificial elements" of the city—symbolized by the concrete pavement—on Frederick Law Olmsted's Central Park. In other words, Chase's Impressionist idyll is really a Realist social document.

That argument cuts both ways, however, and in the most laughable fashion. Not content with making Realists out of the Impressionists, the curators want to do the reverse as well. They've come up with the word "euphemism" to describe the fact that Bellows, Sloan, *et al.* don't go as far as the curators would obviously like them to in chronicling the cruel realities of middle-class city life. Robert Henri pulls his punches, we are told, in his 1902 beach painting *At Far Rockaway*, by not depicting this resort as the crowded and vulgar place it actually was. That is, he is acting too much like an Impressionist, focusing on appearances and mood. You can almost hear the curators saying, "Tsk, tsk," in admonishment.

There's a parlor-game, Pin-the-Tail-on-the-Donkey quality to this new art history: decide what you're looking for, then count the number of instances of it in each picture. It hardly matters whether or not the rubric really fits. The practitioners of this particular method are like out-of-control Freudians, finding breasts and phalluses in everything they look at. Only here what they're finding is socio-political content.

The paintings manage to shuck it all off pretty easily. You read the wall labels, chuckle (or groan), and move on. In fact, for sheer visual pleasure and unabashed painterly mastery, it's hard to think of another current exhibition as rewarding as this one. It's a pity that the show is something of a wasted opportunity. Now that these paintings have all gone out for this exhibition, owners won't be eager to lend them again for a while, which means a really good show devoted to some aspect of American Impressionism or Realism can't happen for many years.

"American Impressionism and Realism" will travel to the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth (August 21–October 30, 1994), the Denver Art Museum (December 3, 1994–February 5, 1995), and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (March 12–May 14, 1995). A catalogue, by H. Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry, has been published by the Met and Harry N. Abrams (400 pages, $75; $45 paper).

—*Eric Gibson*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Treasures in Heaven:
Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts"
at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.
May 4–August 7, 1994

Surely one of the most unusual exhibitions on view in New York at the moment is this collection of about ninety Armenian illuminated manuscripts at the Pierpont Morgan Library. By "unusual" I do not, of course, mean to include the many examples of ritualized psychopathology one regularly sees mounted in various SoHo "performance art" galleries and, alas, at trendy museums like the Whitney. The objects on view at the Morgan are *aesthetically* unusual: quite beautiful, some of them, but unlike anything in the Western tradition of manuscript illumination I have ever seen.

Like most everything the Morgan Library does, this exhibition—the first ever devoted to Armenian illuminated manuscripts in the U.S.—is a serious scholarly performance: sensitively installed and accompanied by a great deal of informative historical material. Thomas F. Mathews, a professor at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, and Roger S. Wieck, associate curator of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts at the Morgan, organized the exhibition, drawing on numerous U.S. collections, including the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, which owns some of the rarest artifacts on view.

Although Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its state religion (*c.* 314), its isolation in the mountains of Asia Minor and its place at the Eastern border of Christendom meant that its religious life (like its cultural life generally) would develop in idiosyncratic ways. Not only did medieval Armenia subscribe to various theological heterodoxies, but also its scriptures occupied a very different place in Armenian religious life from the place they occupied in orthodox Latin Christianity. Most of the manuscripts included in this exhibition are Gospel Books, illuminated texts of the four gospels, written in the vernacular, Armenian, instead of in Latin or Greek. They were venerated in Armenia and were regarded as possessing almost talismanic power. Thousands of them were commissioned privately in the belief that doing so assured one a permanent memorial in heaven.

The exhibition opens with a tenth-century book called Gospels of the Priest—the second oldest Armenian illuminated manuscript in the world—and includes a handful of manuscripts that were painted as late as the early eighteenth century (the importance of Gospel Books faded out elsewhere in the eleventh century). At the center of the exhibition are manuscripts that were illuminated between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The style and competence of the illumination varies widely. Scholars distinguish broadly between a largely untutored clerical or folk tradition of manuscript illumination and a more elaborate courtly tradition. Many examples of both are on view here.

One of the most striking things about these manuscripts is the presence of Eastern motifs in a genre that most of us firmly associate with Western artistic practice. Unlike Byzantine art, Armenian art betrays the polyglot influences of its geographical location at the unhappy crossroads of the Hellenistic, Iranian, Byzantine, and Islamic worlds. Not only did this put the Armenian kingdom in permanent jeopardy of invasion by foreign powers, but it also left a deep and multifaceted impression on its art. One sees in the art the influence of everything from French Gothic illumination (in the Cilician manuscripts of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries) to Islamic motifs (in the so-called Gladzor Gospels, which was completed in 1307). For Western eyes, "Treasures in Heaven" will be a fascinating if difficult-to-place achievement: the story and medium are familiar, but the treatment is uncompromisingly exotic. Those who miss the exhibition in New York will be able to see it at the Walters Art Gallery, where it will be on view from August 28 to October 23.

A catalogue of the exhibition has been published by the Morgan and Princeton University Press (229 pages, $69.50; $35 paper).

—Roger Kimball

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Theater

Angry women & furious machines

by Donald Lyons

Twenty or thirty years ago, English theater was confidently thought to be thriving. A busy crowd of playwrights, ranging from naturalists like Osborne and Wesker to wits like Stoppard and Orton, was the envy of the world. Now the swarm of scribblers seems gone, save Stoppard (whose last two plays, *Hapgood* and *Arcadia*, have had no New York productions) and Alan Bennett. What has arisen in their stead is a directors' theater possessing great willfulness and flaunting a common expressionist style, a reborn Meyerholdism that might be dubbed the New Directorate.

Four recent imports from London, all pretty faithful replications of their originals, illustrate the phenomenon. Nicholas Hytner's *Carousel*, discussed in an earlier report, can serve as paradigm: an old warhorse ideologically deconstructed, emotionally stripped, and given a new master image that dominates the stage. In *Carousel*, that image was the globe of the earth itself.

Jonathan Kent, whose bailiwick is the Almeida Theatre, is another of the new London directorial breed; his production of Euripides' *Medea* resurfaced at the Longacre. Its set, by Peter J. Davison, declares the mother concept of the staging: we see a high, beetling, stage-choking, V-shaped intersection of two metallic plates that are in due course decomposed into smaller rectangles which slide and clank and finally collapse with a maximum of din. It's as if *Medea* were being enacted at a crashed but still operational spaceship on the planet Zargon —with Medea as the creature from *Alien*. There's a pool in center stage (the New Directorate likes water on stage) at which Medea's little boys are playing in the opening tableau. The chorus were three women in black robes, hoveringly anxious Mediterranean crones; their utterances range from the unintelligible to the uninteresting, but Greek choruses are a problem no one but Ariane Mnouchkine has licked. The men, dupes like Creon and Aegeus or knaves like Jason, were put across clearly, cleanly, stolidly by, respectively, John Turner, Donald Douglas, and Tim Oliver Woodward. The title figure was Diana Rigg, who whirled about frantically, furiously in a tight red dress, pausing to crouch angrily or gesture fiercely or purr sweetly; the effect was a bit like watching Martha Graham in fast-motion photography. The whole performance was pitched in too intense a key and begged for some emotional variety, but a sardonic splendor did break at moments through the psychotic fever: at one point, Medea snobbishly sneers that she, a granddaughter of the Sun, has little to fear from a local princess who is merely the granddaughter of Sisyphus; in the final tableau, the infanticide, poised aloft in a bath of white light, tells her desolate husband that his pain is music to her ears and then faces triumphantly toward grandfather Sun, ready for her celestial close-up.

A virtue of this production is Alistair El-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

liot's new translation. Elliot elicits from the Greek, at least from the dialogue portions, stark, spare, antithetical phrasings that clarify the play's points. Thus, from Medea's words before killing her sons, "I know what sort of evils I am about to perform," Elliot gets, "I understand the horror, I know what I'm about to do." For "a wretched woman I" he writes "I was born unhappy and a woman." Elliot has the art of teasing out of the Greek playable, sayable lines that do not simplify or travesty Euripides' intentions.

These intentions—Euripides' as well as Kent's—are fairly obvious: to fantasize a jilted older first wife's consummate vengeance. It is a satisfying feminist daydream, made palatable by the reduction of Jason to relentless fatuity ("you got more than you gave; you live in Greece, after all"). But for all Euripides' dramaturgical skill and psychological cunning, the play struck me this time as flashy rather than profound, brilliant rather than wise. As for Diana Rigg, I prefer her modern-day, poisoned-cookie Medea in the BBC program "Mother Love" to this frantic ancestress with her poisoned robe.

An instructive contrast to this heavy-breathing flashiness was the sharply political but simple and straightforward *Iphigeneia at Aulis* at the Jean Cocteau this spring.

Adrian Noble, the Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, brought his production of *The Winter's Tale*, with sets by Anthony Ward, to BAM this spring. Noble is a star of the New Directorate; it was his picture that topped a group of three on the cover of the BAM program. The play began with a little boy playing with a globe—a sight intended to convey to us, according to the program, that the events were all happening in the "wildly jealous mind" of Leontes, the paranoid king of Sicily, whose wife, Hermione, is all but killed by his mistake. But the play we see does not resemble the inside of a madman's head at all; it rather resembles an enormous aquarelle where white clouds form and re-form in a sky of Della Robbia blue and pastel balloons dance aloft. This weather yields to storm and rain and umbrellas (the date is 1910) for the trial of Hermione, which climaxes the production's first half. I confess that, at intermission, I was wondering why the RSC had gone to the bother of exporting this pleasant but uninvolving mounting of the beautiful late romance; the acting was but competent, ranging from the grouchy (John Nettles as Leontes) to the preachy (Gemma Jones as wise counselor Paulina). The second half cleared up my puzzlement: we are in Bohemia; sixteen years have passed, as conveyed in a balloon-borne report by a personified Time to two dozing geezers. There then ensues a pastoral jamboree set in a sort of outdoor café, complete with dancing couples, a vaudeville comic (Autolycus) in baggy pants doing tedious light-fingered routines, a clown on a bicycle, an oompah band, a soft-shoe routine, gawking bobby-soxers in cardigans, a male chorus sporting balloons as phalloi and testicles, and much more.

Noble has, in a word, made an American musical out of *The Winter's Tale*, and not even a good one like *Carousel* but a corny one like *The Music Man*. There is, it seems, no other style available today to express festal joy or pastoral holiday. Noble's solution is a crowd-pleaser, but it rang forced and condescending to me. Worse, there is no real place in all its rollicking cacophony for the Botticellian exquisiteness of the exchanges between young lovers Perdita ("daffodils/ That come before the swallow dares, and take/ The winds of March with beauty . . .") and Florizel ("When you do dance, I wish you/ A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do/ Nothing but that, move still, still so/ And own no other function"). This Perdita pants in Cockney, this Florizel is wooden of tongue. The agenda behind all the horseplay is, I suspect, to show the lower orders at happy, human, class-free play, in contrast to the snobbish classism of King Polixenes, who is outraged at finding his heir consorting with a shepherdess. Noble is far more upset by Polixenes' "classism" than by Leontes' "sexism"; in Kent's *Medea* the latter sin weighed more heavily.

The production regained a sober com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

petence in the final Sicilian "resurrection" scenes, gravely played with the "statue" facing toward a sky of darkest blue.

The third and, so to speak, most arresting sample of New Directorate theater is Stephen Daldry's revival of the old J. B. Priestley melodrama *An Inspector Calls*. Priestley, of course, was a hack novelist and playwright and a prolific Labour propagandist. Readers of Christopher Sykes's memoir of Evelyn Waugh will recall Waugh's clash with Priestley on the occasion of the latter's hostile notice of *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*. Waugh spoke of the moral weather in Priestley, so adept at "sucking up to the lower classes." "It is instructive," Waugh wrote, "to re-read his powerful novel *Blackout in Gretley*, which was written at a very dark time in the war when national unity was of vital importance. Its simple theme is that the English upper classes were in conspiracy to keep the workers in subjection even at the cost of national defeat." *An Inspector Calls* was written in 1945 and was still very much in the spirit of *Blackout in Gretley* (it is hard not to suspect for a second that that title—and perhaps Priestley in toto—are Waugh inventions).

On an evening in 1910, a dinner is in progress at the home of the rich Birling family in "Brumley," an industrial city in Priestley's native Yorkshire. The family's hearty complacency is interrupted by one Inspector Goole (a deft authorial subtlety, this name), who proceeds to lay the responsibility for the suicide of a poor shopgirl at the door, successively and cumulatively, of *each* of the Birlings. Pa Birling had sacked her from his factory for requesting a raise; daughter Birling had got her fired from a shop for insufficient groveling; Ma Birling had turned the girl away from her charity on the grounds that "I didn't like her manner"; the Birling son-in-law had wickedly seduced and abandoned the girl; the Birling son—can you guess?—has impregnated but sort of cared for her. And all this tendentious cant is written in language of stupefying banality: "Your mother, Lady Croft," says the inspector to the son-in-law, as if he wouldn't know his own mother's name; "Yes, yes, shut up, between us we killed her," moans somebody else. At the climax, the inspector delivers a Labour pep talk, proleptically anti-Thatcherite, about how "we are members of one society, we must care for one another" and how the rich must "learn [this] or be taught in fire, in blood, in anguish." Then there's some abracadabra where the inspector vanishes and turns out not to have existed and the evil rich relax only to have a telephone ring to announce the arrival of an inspector . . .

It is all pathetic enough, a stew of Agatha Christie and Bernard Shaw lying undigested on a weak stomach, but appetizing fare for Daldry and his set designer Ian MacNeil (New Directors tend to come paired with designers). Daldry, who was recently described by *Vogue* as "the powerful new boss of England's national theater of dissent, the Royal Court," and MacNeil have let themselves go. They have made the house of the wicked rich family a mansarded, glowing jewelbox of a building that sits upstage on wheels and swivels and opens up and goes through various pointless permutations until it deconstructs itself (shades of Medea's spaceship) and reconstructs itself again. The house is—I get it!—a metaphor for the ruling class. And what, by the way, of the proletariat that Priestley wisely kept off stage? *Nous avons changé tout cela*. Groups of silent specters lurk in the circumambient fog and rain that fill the vast empty stage space (poor folk, I hope Actors Equity has a good health plan). They say nothing and are never alluded to. They are led by a silent child (little boys form a leitmotif of the New Directorate—*cf.* the children in *Medea* and *The Winter's Tale*). In the last tableau, it is *they* who are huddled inside the reconfigured dwelling while the rich family shivers in the rain. But even such flashy gimmickry has a life of its own; these looming wretches become not a revolutionary vanguard or a suffering lump but a pack of zombies out of *Night of the Living Dead*. If they're the alternative, give me the top-hatted cads.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The performers, who include such polished veterans as Philip Bosco and Rosemary Harris as the parents, are here forced into robotic gesturing, midatlantic accents, and magniloquent hamming. As often with theater that poses as "radical," what we see is cruelty to the actors. Royal Court import Kenneth Cranham as the inspector has one note, that of Yorkshire hectoring.

It only remains to be noted that *An Inspector Calls*, a work filled with envious venom and mendaciously sentimental rhetoric, had its world première in 1945 in . . . Moscow. Perfect. Perfect, too, is its current metamorphosis in the midst of a culture ripe for neo-Stalinization.

By contrast, three American plays on recent New York stages—William Inge's 1953 *Picnic*, Arthur Miller's new *Broken Glass*, and Edward Albee's new *Three Tall Women*—approach us as works by playwrights, not as concepts by dramaturges. They have, to be sure, been directed, but there is no instance of a directorial personality interposed between us and the work.

Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women*, at the Promenade, is a two-part play, a diptych, about a rich old battle-ax. We're in her New York bedroom: a big bed flanked by curtains and topped by a reproduction of *Blue Boy*; the room has scalloped doors and flocked pilasters; James Noone's set design does the exact job with a minimum of fuss. The old lady, called simply A, is cranky, arbitrary, tyrannical, nasty, incontinent, and anti-Semitic. In the first panel, she has two patsies to vent her spleen upon: a paid companion-caretaker, B, and a lawyer, C. They take contrasting tacks with the old woman: B is tartly tolerant, exasperatedly sympathetic, wittily and even masochistically collaborative; C is huffy, disgusted, disdainful. In the interstices of the character of this pampered egomaniac of ninety-one we sense the contours of her lived life: the scrappy childhood and poverty, taking care of a feckless sister, the catch of a rich husband ("He gave me pretty things, pearls and diamonds . . . I can't remember if I loved him"), once seeing Norma Shearer, her estrangement from an adoptive son ("Is today the day *he* comes?"). This character is the real thing: a genuine monster presented with stony unforgivingness by the writer. It is at once indelicate and necessary to point out, as the author has done in interviews, that the overall situation in the play, if not any and every specific detail, echoes the relationship between Albee and his adoptive mother.

In the second panel, the three actresses on stage have all become A: A1 is twenty-six, A2 is fifty-two, A3 is ninety. A stick figure of A at ninety-one lies moribund on the bed as the three women review the past. A1 looks at her later selves and wonders, "How did I change?" "I was a nice girl," she insists, recalling the heroine of Salinger's "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut." A2 takes us through the shaping experiences of sex (some of this, though entertaining, is a bit lingeringly anatomical to be entirely credible on the lips of a woman of this time and culture) and marriage and hostile in-laws and adultery and a savage rift with her son. "The Boy"—an actor dressed in preppie togs—enters at one point and spends the act silently at the bedside gazing at the big doll; the presence of this alienated and (it's been revealed) homosexual son marks not a deathbed reconciliation but a dry mockery of one. The more she hears of her own future, the more A1 protests, "I will never become you, either of you . . . I will not become you, I deny you." Albee is hot to punish this innocent optimism; as A3 says, "it's all downhill after sixteen." Happiness is a youthful illusion; consciousness of things brings only pain; real happiness lies only in the annihilating grasp of death. The women in the second part stand in triangulated poses of mutual accusation. Between the insipidity of youth and the rancor of age stands the pungent brilliance of middle age, as incarnated in A2, a woman whose coruscatingly articulate negation of life reminded me of Gertrude Johnson in Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution*, a character herself modeled on Mary McCarthy.

The withering bleakness of this play is not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

depressing. For one thing, the formalist bravura of the structure—three tall women who are different followed by three tall women who are, except for chronology, not—gives a wit to what the play's about. The sprightliness of form purges much of the bleakness of the content. Then, too, the absolute rightness with which the author *gets* his subject's milieu and tones of voice has a paradoxically exhilarating effect, for all the bitterness. It is certainly the strangest tribute by a playwright to a mother since *Long Day's Journey into Night*. But it is not O'Neill whom one is finally reminded of; it is another cold-eyed chronicler of the New York rich, Edith Wharton. In any case, this electrifying and hilarious and grown-up play is not only Albee's best work since *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (an overrated and overlong and overcoded play); it is the play he was born to write.

The three actresses are, under Lawrence Sacharow's direction, powerful contributors to the general excellence. American Jordan Baker has a fresh-scrubbed, no-nonsense blondness that works for the starchily disapproving lawyer and for the wide-eyed A1. British Myra Carter plays the old woman in both parts with gripping, almost frightening verisimilitude; she gets both the universal pathology of cantankerous old age and the particular crotchets of this creature. Most impressive is Marian Seldes, the companion and then A2. Seldes gives the companion a lunging, hunchbacked, stooping swoop of a movement that fills in something in this smart but wounded woman and answers the unspoken question of why this woman puts up with *this*. As A2, Seldes physically choreographs and morally radiates the geography of a soured life. It is wonderful to see this much intelligence focused so fruitfully, so unegoistically on the creation of stage character: it marks the theatrical arrival of a major artist, a player who is really doing the kind of thing Maggie Smith gets credit for doing. Finally, the solemn elegance and almost-ironic accuracy of the clothes the women wear deserve grateful mention for quiet artistry; they are by Muriel Stockdale.

Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass*, at the Booth, is set in Brooklyn in November of 1938 and examines the hysterical paralysis of Sylvia Gellburg. Sliding panels and a revolving stage whisk us from doctor's office to bedroom to living room. Sylvia's doctor, Harry Hyman, functions as all-purpose physician, therapist, shrink, questioner, and dramatic convenience in the lumpy dramaturgy of Miller.

What's wrong with Sylvia? Two things: the Nazis and her husband. The Nazis have just perpetrated Kristallnacht, scattering the broken glass of the play's title on the streets of Germany; Sylvia compulsively reads about it and about its vicious sequels, with elderly Jewish men made to clean the sidewalks with toothbrushes. "Where's Roosevelt? Where's England?" she wails. The doctor thinks she is on to something, telling his wife (who also serves, confusingly, as his bimbo secretary) that "she knows something." Sylvia's forebodings proved, of course, accurate.

But if the doctor, a tall and handsome equestrian (in Brooklyn, yet), is a sympathetic listener to Sylvia, her short and nebbishy husband is not. Poor Philip does not get the first thing about his wife, and this short play largely consists of the unfolding of his obtuseness and callousness. First, his job: he's the head of the mortgage department at Brooklyn Guarantee Trust, the bank's first Jewish officer and thus, he naïvely supposes, the trusted friend of its WASP yachtsman president. Second, his politics: he tries to see the "other side" of Kristallnacht; he kvetches about "FDR and the welfare *mishegass*" (an unlikely locution in 1938, surely). "You almost sound like a Republican," opines the sage doctor. Third, his self-hatred: Sylvia says he "never wants to talk about being Jewish . . . he sounds sometimes as if he didn't like Jews." Fourth, all these are but the outward signs of a malaise embedded deep in the marriage. Philip made Sylvia give up her job as "head bookkeeper" to raise their son, who has, to her scorn and his pride, gone to West Point; he suppressed her sexuality and he has been im-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

potent for twenty years; he once threw a beefsteak at her (I think). Sylvia regards her marriage as a wasteland, lamenting that "I took more care of my shoes than of my life" (actually, that's the play's one really good line).

Confronted at last with the bank's instinctive anti-Semitism, Philip collapses and is himself paralyzed. As he sinks, his wife rises. She speaks back to him for the first time. Stung, he asks, "What's this tone of voice?" "It's a Jewish woman's tone of voice," comes the applause-getting rejoinder. When he finally dies, she gets out of bed.

Such is Miller's slight anecdote, a sort of belated valentine to Linda Loman. But the anecdote has been so filled with hot air it pops. There is, first, a characteristic Miller multiplicity of focus: is the play about Nazis or about marriage? If the former, it seems too easy to accord one character a miraculous prescience denied everybody else. (And incidentally, it is odd to suggest that it took especial sensitivity to be worried *in 1938* about Germany's Jews. And furthermore, Sylvia should have been grateful her son was in West Point.) If the latter, Miller has put a very heavy hand on the scales, burdening poor Philip with every variety of wrongness—Willie Loman as a "successful" Republican—whilst creating a heroine of perfectly attuned sensitivity. Lillian Hellman might have blanched at such dice-loading. No, come to think of it, she wouldn't. And, to be fair, Arthur Miller is a warmer person than the Hellmans of this world. He has a heart, and he tries to humanize Philip in the man's final moments as he lies in the bed he remembers buying at "Abraham & Straus . . . and then I had a soda at Schrafft's." (In the same brandname-nostalgia vein, Sylvia rents *Anthony Adverse* from Womrath's, but this is a vein perilously close to the easy sentimentality of Neil Simon.) It would be nice to be able to praise Arthur Miller, now nearing eighty; it would nice if he owned a suppler artistic imagination and a more alive language.

Broken Glass did not receive an ideal production. John Tillinger's direction chose to emphasize a laborious and ungainly set at the expense of any dramatic urgency or build (of which I admit there wasn't much). Ron Rifkin's husband was too woebegone and bathetic from the get-go, while Amy Irving's youngish wife ran to monotonous languor.

William Inge's *Picnic* has been streamlined, cut, redated, and revived by director Scott Ellis at the Roundabout. Inge was a Kansas naturalist, a homespun chronicler of sad little lives lost; he had an ear for human speech and his plays play well, better than they read and better than they replay in the mind afterward. He was routinely spoken of in the 1950s as part of a ruling triumvirate—Williams, Miller, Inge—in American playwrighting. He lacked the ambitiousness of the other two, and, if his provincial modesty kept him from their overreaching, it barred him also from their heights.

But *Picnic*, Inge's best and most typical work, was worth a fresh look-see. The story is simple: a bunch of Kansas women are upset by the passing-through of a handsome drifter. Flo Owens, after being deserted by a sexy, no-good husband, is bringing up her two daughters, bright and college-bound tomboyish Millie and pretty, in fact gorgeous, Madge. The Owenses' ramshackle backyard (beautifully evocative set by Tony Walton) abuts that of colorful spinster Helen, whose life-task is the tending of an ailing and demanding (offstage) mother. Rooming with the Owenses is spinster schoolteacher Rosemary. It's a world of women unfulfilled and desperate. Flo is fixing to marry off Madge, her ace, to a rich beau from the right side of the tracks, but all is undone when shirtless Hal lays eyes on Madge and gets to telling her all about his abusive, low-rent childhood. Hooked, Madge skips a planned picnic with her rich beau to slowdance with Hal in the yard in the glow of an orange late-afternoon sun (lovely lighting by Peter Kaczorowski). Meant as a big, sexy moment and forced on the dramaturgically shy Inge by original director Josh Logan, this dance falls a bit flat in the Roundabout production, in vivid

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

contrast to the functionally similar pas de deux in the Nicholas Hytner/Kenneth Macmillan *Carousel*. Topless Hal gets Rosemary hot, too, and she's soon drunkenly proposing to her set-in-his-bachelor-ways storekeeper steady.

The play's defining moment comes when Flo begs her older daughter not to repeat her own mistake: to go for security and not sex. But Madge heads off to Tulsa to join Hal, who's got a job in a hotel there "hoppin' bells." The story of *Picnic* is, in fact, the story of the second generation in *Carousel*, but in *Picnic* lust/love/whatever wins out over prudence, as it did not exactly in *Carousel*. Lydia Bennet is the approved heroine of this Midwest *Pride and Prejudice*. The melancholy mother is left alone in her yard at the end listening to the whistle of a train.

There's a better play wanting to get out of *Picnic*, a play about mothers and daughters and about the many inflections of women's friendships and neighborlinesses and laughters. (For example, this exchange: "I threw the *new* bottle of cleaning fluid into the trash." "You're the limit! C'mon Madge, let's finish that dress.") It's Inge, really, and not the women in the play, who is fatally beglamored by the notion of the shirtless, phallic stud. And it is a *notion*, since Hal is unreal—a sweet, misguided, feckless, misunderstood hunk of a guy. Inge hadn't enough imaginative distance from his eros to see what a real Hal would be like, to write his own version of Stanley Kowalski.

Taking a cue from an early Inge draft, Ellis has systematically backdated the play to the 1930s, changing Millie's "filthy" reading matter from *The Ballad of the Sad Café* to *Sanctuary* and substituting Carole Lombard and Jean Arthur for Betty Grable and Lana Turner in casual conversation. The songs played and the clothes worn and the beauty-cream billboard ad that (too symbolically) is seen from the backyard are also styled for the 1930s. But Ellis is wrong. The 1930s were tough, raw times in places like Kansas. *Picnic*, with its economically stable, upwardly mobile, college-oriented matriarchal society and its prurient obsession with male sexuality (though Ellis wisely cuts some of this, e.g., Rosemary on Greek statues)—*Picnic* is unmistakably postwar in flavor. The 1950s should have been "period" enough for Ellis.

The performances match the play's strengths and weaknesses. The grown women are fine: Polly Holliday as the mother, Anne Pitoniak as the cheerfully stoic neighbor, Debra Monk as the schoolteacher. Angela Goethals has fun with the foolproof role of the wisecracking tomboy sister (it was played by Kim Stanley back in 1953). But the leads are as inadequate as their written roles: Kyle Chandler merely registers nice-guyness in a role that needs edge and danger; film actress Ashley Judd as Madge is merely beautiful, which is not enough on stage. Of course, she has to compete with the image of Kim Novak on the screen, where "mere" beauty is enough.

Publisher's note: Back issues of *The New Criterion* are for sale at $6 each. A list of highlights is available upon request from the Office Manager.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The media

Nixon & "Middlemarch": new versions for the 90s

by James Bowman

Anyone who remembered the media's outpouring of vitriol during the Watergate scandal—or, for that matter during several earlier phases of Richard Nixon's career—must have been astonished at the statesmanlike treatment accorded him by the press at his funeral. Many of the same reporters who made Watergate into the domestic political story of the century seemed to have forgotten that it even took place. Now the story about Nixon was his amazing longevity, his legendary sagacity, and, above all, his perseverance. "He never quit," agreed Bill Clinton and Billy Graham, Stephen Ambrose and Henry Kissinger. Funny, I thought that was just what his detractors hated about him.

This unexpected generosity had in a way very little to do with Nixon himself. His death represented the loss of something more than that of an ex-President and latter-day sage and seer. In fact, for all his assiduously promoted reputation in that line, he seems in historical hindsight to have been proven wrong more often than right. As part of the reaction against the dewy-eyed coverage by most of the mainstream press, *The New Republic*, unwilling to give up the anti-Nixon habits of nearly half a century, ran a double-page spread called "Nixon-hating: an anthology," followed by Jonathan Rauch's contention that his was "the worst presidency of the century." Jacob Weisberg, a *New Republic* alumnus writing in *New York* magazine, went Rauch one better and called Nixon "the most colossal disaster in the history of the American presidency."

And in truth, such extravagant statements seemed less hyperbolical than some of the praise emanating from other, less expected quarters. The trick of both Rauch's and Weisberg's arguments was to put to one side Watergate and residual passions, still capable of being fanned into flame, about the supposed "red-baiting" of Nixon's early career and to concentrate on his policy mistakes. These, even in foreign policy, where his wisdom has for years been a matter of general agreement among friends and enemies alike, were egregious enough.

Four years of his policy of "Vietnamization" and some twenty thousand American deaths only postponed the day when all of Vietnam had to be handed over to the Communists, while the involvement of Cambodia in the struggle only helped pave the way for the horrors of the Khmer Rouge. "Détente" with the Soviet Union did not survive the invasion of Afghanistan and probably helped to extend the life of the corrupt and moribund Brezhnev régime and of the Soviet Empire. Both Rauch and Weisberg are generous about the "opening to China," but even there it is hard, as someone has remarked, to think of one single thing that China has done differently as a result.

In domestic policy things were even worse. Nixon's jettisoning of the gold standard and the Bretton Woods international

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

monetary system, the imposition of wage and price controls, the indexing of social security—all of these things now look like mere preludes to the inflation of the 1970s and the deficits of the 1980s. Rauch is particularly damning about the explosion of entitlement costs and the regulatory burden imposed on the economy by the federal government under Nixon; Weisberg darkly suspects him of having embraced and expanded President Johnson's Great Society programs deliberately in order to discredit big-government liberalism.

But hardly anybody else in the media cared about any of this. Nixon now belonged to the ages not as a governmental technician, good or bad, but as a symbol. Cast aside your *New Republic* and take up your *TV Guide*, which gave the Nixon funeral a thumbs-up "Cheers" in its "Cheers 'n' Jeers" column: "Love him or hate him," it said, "his passing drew the country's leaders—and viewing citizens—together for a moment of contemplation. To see five Presidents . . . as well as the rich mix of people from the tapestry of Nixon's life, from Rev. Billy Graham to Spiro Agnew, was to see America whole. Back in troubled 1968, Nixon said he wanted to 'bring us together.' What he could not do in life, he did in death, around the TV hearth."

Nor was it just the great unwashed around the TV hearth who, engaged in this unwonted but satisfying "contemplation" of the former president's symbolic significance, were inclined to treat him with indulgence. While a few conservative-minded people like Jonathan Rauch and Jonathan Yardley (who wrote in *The Washington Post*: "Day of Mourning indeed! Good riddance is more like it") were laying into Nixon with a will, *The Nation*—whose anti-Nixonism goes back further than anyone's and has kept pace, *pari passu*, with its long and lonely championing of Alger Hiss—was looking down from a more Olympian height to find the former president not so bad after all.

Andrew Kopkind wrote: "Richard Nixon was, at the end as at the beginning, a monster of a million disguises. But so are they all monsters; it's just the disguises that change." Gore Vidal, with a typically narcissistic insouciance, quoted himself to the effect that "we are Nixon; he is us." And Robert Sheer argued that "hard as it may be for liberals to accept, Richard Nixon was a better President than most"—having arrived at this shocking position by comparing him closely with Kennedy and Johnson. But the most interesting of *The Nation*'s revaluations was by Katha Pollitt, who held that "Nixon was really the last President. He was the last Leader of the Free World who controlled events rather than being controlled by them, who acted—albeit deplorably, deceitfully, disastrously—in his own person rather than as the tool and mouthpiece of organized economic and political interests. He was the last President who actually had a personality about which it was meaningful to inquire."

To be sure, he was an awful old fraud, but, she says, you could see him being a fraud: "The machinery of public relations and popular opinion manufacture was still crude enough that one could hear it whirring and thunking, and one could see, too, the man at the controls, eating his cottage cheese with ketchup." By contrast, she asks, "who can say what Carter or Reagan or Bush or Clinton is really like; how much of what they've proposed flows from belief or from expediency? It isn't even an interesting question."

I think that Miss Pollitt here puts her finger on one of the most important reasons for the outbreak of Nixon-nostalgia. The blandness and banality of political character since Nixon are partly a legacy of Watergate and the certainty it gave rise to that anyone foolish enough to have a real character beneath the public façade would see it ruthlessly exposed by the vulgar and self-important media. Now the art of politics has become the manufacture by a non-whirring and thunking P.R. machine of a "real" character whose vulnerabilities and sensitivities (Bill Clinton, we learned last year, continues to live with the pain of having been called a fat boy when he first went to school)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are merely guarantors that their possessor is "caring" and "compassionate" toward the increasing number who expect him to assuage their own suffering.

As a result, a younger generation of radicals like Katha Pollitt has grown up "longing for authenticity of any sort, even evil." This generational theme also came out in Jonathan Alter's "Growing Up With Nixon" in *Newsweek*. Alter sees Nixon as a sort of anti-Roosevelt: "Imagine what the heroic use of power in World War II did for a young generation's faith in their leaders. Now imagine what the criminal abuse of power in the Nixon years did to the next generation." John Dean's "cancer on the presidency" was to Mr. Alter "more than just the corruption of one administration; it was the corruption of politics as a whole in the mind of a generation."

Anne Applebaum, a tougher and cooler customer, writes about the same thing in a more matter-of-fact fashion in the (British) *Spectator*. "I did not experience the Watergate scandal as traumatic or wrenching," she claims, because "I do not remember the purer, cleaner presidents who are meant to have preceded Nixon . . . My generation, the generation whose political awareness began with Watergate, does not have untainted heroes: my generation assumes that politicians are probably corrupt."

But an Alterian note of self-pity eventually creeps in here too, and Miss Applebaum concludes that "whether or not Nixon was sufficiently guilty, the fact remains that my generation never had the chance to feel innocent. For this I have only Nixon to blame." Bill Gifford, writing in the *Washington Post* "Outlook" section, says the same thing in a much more straightforwardly postmodern way. Speaking as a self-appointed "representative of Generation X," he proclaims "Nixon as the scapegoat for all our woes . . . He personified old age and treachery, triumphant over youth and virtue. Is it any wonder, then, that we Nixon babies grew up apathetic and conflicted about authority? That we expect our leaders to go down flaming in scandals?" He quotes the Meat Puppets ("a seminal X-er band") as singing "I've grown tired of living Nixon's mess." And if that sounds too self-pitying, well, "we learned it from you-know-who."

Here, finally, is a reason to feel genuinely sorry for poor old RN: however bad a president or a man he may have been, it does seem hard to go on blaming him for our various social discontents. Perhaps it is part of the burden of true greatness that the statute of limitations on our crimes, real or imagined, never runs out. Gifford even tries to make a connection between Nixon and the dead pop star Kurt Cobain, since Nixon's "era was the Superfund site in which so many Cobains grew." But, as Henry V might have said, Nixon purposed not Kurt Cobain's suffering when he covered up the Watergate burglary. He may have done ill, but he did not bind us to that ill—still less to other ills, like Kurt Cobain's heroin addiction—forever.

But just as Nixon was the perfect scapegoat, Cobain was the perfect victim. The howls of anguish at his suicide which found their way into print and onto videotape were further proof, if proof were needed, that the most pampered generation in America's long history of pampering her young is continuing to amuse itself by pretending to unique and horrible sufferings—and is being taken seriously too. Just as the media is re-echoing with their bleats of self-pity, so politics is becoming a means of casting their plight into any form which will place the responsibility for it anywhere but on themselves and their parents.

Thus the issue of TV "violence" continues to lurk in the social background, as now there are at least nine bills pending in Congress which attempt to regulate it. If people don't want their children to spend all their time watching violent television or what the British call "video nasties" or playing with computer games which simulate violence, or listening to rap music which chants about it, why would they ask Senator Simon to stop them? Why don't they stop them themselves? As with the "War on Drugs," we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

focus all our energies on those brave, entrepreneurial characters who provide the supply and ignore almost completely the lazy, cowardly, effete, and degenerate culture which creates the demand. Give me a forthright drug-dealer any day over a wretched, sensitive "screwed-up" junkie of a victim like Kurt Cobain.

The other favorite victim of the month was Michael Fay, the eighteen-year-old from Dayton, Ohio, who received four strokes of the cane for vandalizing cars in Singapore. The extraordinary interest that his case provoked in the press—which will probably make him rich after he goes on the talk-show circuit this summer—was obviously the product of a deep and ambivalent fascination. America's media elite looked closely at the almost unimaginably alien methods of an Oriental despotism, which apparently solve problems that we have taught ourselves to think intractable, and quite predictably concluded that the poor victim of their rigor (who suffered from Attention Deficit Disorder as well as a sore bottom) was very hard done by. Still, something was accomplished if it meant that you could read on *The New York Times*'s Op-Ed page Mr. Lee Kuan Yew's opinion that "there is such a thing called evil, and it is not the result of being a victim of society. You are just an evil man, prone to do evil things, and you have to be stopped from doing them."

Not many people stateside saying that sort of thing anymore! I thought of this unfashionable moralism while watching the BBC's television adaptation of *Middlemarch*, which ran on PBS's "Masterpiece Theatre" during April and May. I also thought of a scene from one of the many neglected masterpieces of our century never likely to find themselves adapted for "Masterpiece Theatre"—namely, Wyndham Lewis's *Self Condemned*. In this clearly autobiographical story of the author's painful self-exile in Canada at the outbreak of the Second World War, his principal character, René Harding, takes the book up while on his own sea voyage to Canada in 1939:

> Disagreeable sensations ensued almost from the first page. He began reading about the two young ladies, of about twenty years old. Now one was an "ordinary" girl; one so alarmingly unordinary as to cause her sister to be frightened of her. Both the young ladies are beautiful, but the high-minded one slightly more so. A grey-headed, hollow-eyed clergyman makes his appearance (he comes to dinner with the uncle of the two girls). A good-looking young squire arrives at the same time. The painfully priggish young lady is quite rude to the young squire, for being so normal, but finds the unattractive cadaverous clergyman of fifty very much to her taste, and he is engaged upon a work of great learning: how appropriate; she will assist him in this lofty labour. In a few months they are married. Lest the reader should be depressed at the thought of what was in store for this poor young lady in the arms of this elderly clergyman, something is provided by the considerate author. When the reader is first taken to the Rectory, a young man is discovered seated in the garden, sketching it in water-colours. He is a very different kettle of fish from his cadaverous uncle or cousin, the Rector. The reader knows, something tells him, that *in the end* the leading lady will enjoy the embraces of this personable young man. He heaves a sigh of relief. Just to show that the young fellow is a sport, when he sits down again to resume his sketching, he throws his head back (his curls tumbling about as he does so) and emits a short laugh. It is obvious that this young man has the same feelings about the Rector's marriage as the reader has. But after that the reader is taken down to a lower social level. He is introduced to a stock figure, described as a "gentleman-farmer," who is inferior, but full of a disagreeable senile vitality. Prospective heirs are there, and one of them he gleefully unmasks.
>
> At this point René would go no further. This sodden satire, this lifeless realism, provoked him into saying, "Why am I reading this dull nonsense? . . . the scenes depicted, and the hand depicting them, could be preserved in some suitable archive; but should not be handed down as a living document. It is a part of *history*"—with this he dismissed it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> He went out on to the deck and swinging his arm back hurled the heavy book out to sea. After that he returned to their stateroom, lay down and instantly fell asleep.

Even the fans of *Middlemarch* must know exactly what Lewis was getting at. There is a kind of irony-deficient, morally earnest, soap-operaish quality to the novel which the constant interest generated by its writing disguises from all but the most penetrating critics. Unfortunately, it was this quality that was accentuated by the much-praised BBC version. I found myself being reminded again and again of good things in the book, but they were always the good things of *the book* and seemed to have little or nothing to do with its televisual illustration.

If one doubted that, one had only to look at the sorts of people who were getting enthusiastic about the series and assay the vulgarity of Harry Waters's review in *Newsweek*:

> At the epic's core, [Juliet] Aubrey, barely a year out of drama school, gets the endearingly foolish Dorothea exactly right; she's the next Emma Thompson. Equally memorable are Rufus Sewell as the brooding artist who heats Dorothea's hormones and Michael Hordern as a sinfully rich miser who deliciously torments his avaricious relations. "Middlemarch" is the most expensive production in BBC history, and it shows. Grand estates and opulent banquets —you half expect Sebastian Flyte to stroll by. Scriptwriter Andrew Davies even invented some bodice-ripping . . .

These are the words of a man who not only knows nothing of *Middlemarch* but also doesn't *want* to know anything about it. Ever. In short, he is the perfect viewer of the television series.

In a thrilling and very nearly convincing essay in *The New York Review of Books*, Louis Menand painstakingly takes us through the adaptation to show how, "in adapting the story to modern sensibilities, the producers haven't sensationalized *Middlemarch* at all. They have instead taken everything sensational in *Middlemarch* and carefully edited it out. . . . They haven't taken a pious Victorian marriage tale and jazzed it up; they've taken a great late-Romantic poem, a kind of opera of social psychology, and turned it into television's idea of a romantic drama—that is, a lot of good-looking people chasing around after and pairing off with a lot of other good-looking people."

René Harding saw this about the book when, noticing the way that Will Ladislaw shook his curls, he sensed trouble ahead. He was right. There is this quality in George Eliot which made her proleptically ideal for television adaptation and, *pace* Louis Menand, the BBC's adapters did not have to perform radical surgery on the novel in order to accentuate it. Merely the act of dramatization, which is also the act of removing that wise and magnificent authorial voice, was all that it took. Left with nothing but characters and dialogue and plot, we find that the thing is perilously close to the "dull nonsense" that René thought ought to have been banished to an archive.

Actually, the one partial exception is in the part of the story that concerns the Garths and Fred Vincy. Here a pale reflection comes through of the thing that no novelist born since Victoria was on the throne has been able to do convincingly: that is, the representation of goodness. The story of Fred and Mary and their troubled courtship and Fred's relationship with the impossibly good Caleb Garth could only be an embarrassment to a modern novelist. Imagine Horatio Alger or a Victorian chap-book adapted for the "cool" televisual medium and you have some idea of the much greater potential for embarrassment here. It is to the credit of the adapters, then, that they get as much of Fred and Mary and Caleb onto the screen as they do, though they do their best to pare it down to a minimum. This is a pity because it becomes the one portion of the story that rises above the soap opera and also reminds us most powerfully of what it is in the novel that is more than an "opera of social psychology."

For it is also a moral drama of a type now

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

extinct and becoming unrecognizable. We know all about the drama of personal ambition and fulfillment and failure, and Dorothea's and Casaubon's and Ladislaw's and Lydgate's and Rosamund's are all of a familiar type. This familiarity was confidently cited by Russell Baker in one of his plodding introductions as the infallible mark of a great novel. Like Tolstoy, he said, George Eliot created "vast numbers" of characters "as real as the flesh-and-blood people you meet every day." What it is that makes them more real than the characters on the afternoon soaps he did not say—and nor could anyone else, I fancy, without the memory of the novel. But it is Fred and Mary's *unfamiliarity*, their moral exoticism, which, paradoxically, makes them so disturbingly real.

Even Louis Menand, by focusing only on Dorothea's moral heroism, rather misses this point. By comparing her situation at the end of the novel to that of Adam and Eve at the end of *Paradise Lost* or the Poet at the end of *The Prelude*, he makes a persuasive case for George Eliot's modernity as well as her traditionalism. The novel, he finds, is about "the effort to make morality consistent with uncertainty" and goes so far as to suggest that, in a kind of postmodern way, she is satirizing herself in the account of Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies* or Lydgate's search for the "primitive tissue" of all life. "We start to suspect," he writes, "that it's only the author's sympathy with our desire for coherence at any price that prevents her from deconstructing morality all the way down to the ground; and *Middlemarch* comes, at that moment, to seem like a bubble of light held aloft only by our gaze."

But that optical illusion is shattered when our gaze returns to the much more substantial figures of Fred and Mary, who stand there stolidly in the center of the novel and insist on its unabridgeably Victorian quality. Fred and Mary and Caleb will not cede their ground either to the modernist or to the postmodernist expropriator. It is fitting and proper for René Harding, that tortured and penitent child of modernism, to pitch the book into the rolling Atlantic in the course of acting out his tragic fate. It is also fitting and proper that the TV adaptation should turn into just another costume-drama soap opera—a sort of televised Cliffs Notes to remind novel-lovers of the riches therein. It will be better adapted when they parody it on "The Simpsons." But you have to have the sensibility of Richard Nixon to experience *Middlemarch* as it was meant to be experienced. Not much of that around anymore.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fiction chronicle

Cheever Country, 1994

by Brooke Allen

The landscape is much the same as it was a generation ago. American suburbia has changed remarkably little, despite the advent of malls and bypasses, guns and drugs. Suburbia is a landscape of the mind, a utopian experiment. Its failures may be obvious: the protected model communities have proved no safe haven from divorce, alcoholism, suicide and violence. But the suburban ideal, a planned combination of community and privacy, is still resonant in America's fantasy about itself.

Cheever's and Updike's suburbanites married early. They produced children in the Fifties and spent the next ten or fifteen years moving steadily ahead. Then along came the Sixties to shake them up. But since these were slightly square people, well insulated from artists and intellectuals, it was the Seventies by the time they caught on to swinging and wife-swapping, some five years after the Summer of Love. A number of marriages collapsed, or were severely damaged. Alcohol wreaked its havoc. The kids survived as best they could.

A generation has passed, and these same kids, born in the Fifties, are now not only grown up but nearing middle age. Brought up with every material privilege, given the best education, they might be expected to lead lives similar to their parents'. But the times have dealt out a few surprises, and the thirty years separating the generations have changed the rules. The upheavals of the Sixties and Seventies effected a genuine social revolution. The WASP no longer rules supreme. WASP culture has in fact become faintly ridiculous, one might even say "marginalized." An Ivy League education is still the ideal, but it no longer automatically opens doors to the professions; to be white, ambitious, bright, upper-middle-class isn't necessarily enough.

The glittering prizes elude this generation's grasp. An intelligent, hard-working young man enters the academic world: turned down for tenure at a second-string college, he becomes a real-estate salesman, by his lights a dismal admission of failure. Another looks for an editing job. Despite his wit and his impeccable literary pedigree, he ends up working not at *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic* but at a lowbrow, mass-readership magazine. A third, perhaps the most brilliant, fears permanence and therefore works as an office temp.

These situations, from a handful of books by youngish authors, prove that the WASP novel is still alive and reasonably well. It has never been a robust genre, for WASPs are by definition bland, often leading dull lives by choice. (Q: What's the WASP's definition of open-mindedness? A: Dating a Canadian.) WASP rules of discourse preclude vigor, straightforwardness, vulgarity. The technique is based on understatement and self-deprecation; the material between the lines is vastly more important than any actual statements in the text. Irony mutes both tragedy and farce. Henry James was of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

course the genre's grand master; a few gems have been produced in subsequent generations, Evan S. Connell's *Mrs. Bridge*, for example (far superior to its companion volume, *Mr. Bridge*), and John P. Marquand's *The Late George Apley*, as well as the abovementioned suburban stories of Cheever, Updike, and John Irving. Now the next generation is going over the same territory, with a certain amount of success. They are only too conscious of their progenitors.

Take Benjamin Cheever. How could he fail to be a self-conscious writer? It is a brave, perhaps foolhardy action to follow a parent into an arena in which he has achieved outstanding success, and John Cheever was one of the pre-eminent writers of his time. Talk about anxiety of influence! For Benjamin Cheever, a thoughtful writer in his mid-forties, the overwhelming presence of his brilliant and difficult father has provided the center for both of his novels. The very exercise of writing seems, for the younger Cheever, a way of coming to terms with his dependence on, yet separateness from, his father. As Arthur Prentice, the hero of Cheever's first (highly autobiographical) novel *The Plagiarist* (1992), tells his novelist father, Icarus South Prentice, "Some people think that everything I write is a violation of copyright. I know it's your name and you've distinguished it. But it's also my name. It's the only one I've got."

Icarus is an aloof widower who subsists largely on gin, has a Labrador retriever, and is revealed, after his death, to have had a suggestively mysterious friendship with a handsome young man. Arthur Prentice's life corresponds as closely to the author's as Icarus's does to his father's. Like Benjamin, Arthur attended prep school and Antioch College, married young, and fathered a son; Arthur has an editorial job at a digest magazine with a worldwide readership of a hundred million, working on stories like "The Immortal Francisco Franco" and "The Day My Hippie Son Cut His Hair," while Benjamin himself put in eleven years at *Reader's Digest*.

Arthur is well on the way to becoming like his suburban neighbors and colleagues at *The American Reader*, who fight for success at jobs they despise in order to keep up a standard of living they don't enjoy for the benefit of wives they hate. The juxtaposition of the miserable Arthur with his mandarin father is the novel's bitter joke. Whatever he does, Arthur is unable to escape Icarus. He gets jobs because his name is Prentice. People befriend him because they want to get closer to his father. Even his psychiatrist, in a chilling scene, blithely says "I wouldn't be candid if I didn't admit that part of my interest in you relates to your father."

At the time of its publication, *The Plagiarist* was received as a comic novel. Witty, yes; darkly amusing, too; but comic it is surely not. Every laugh is countered with some grim acknowledgment of self-hatred. It is a fascinating but deeply unfunny book, somewhere between a novel and a memoir, embarrassing in its raw glimpses into the author's life: reading it is like eavesdropping in an analyst's office. It is questionable as to whether it counts as fiction at all, and its readers might well have wondered whether Cheever, having so obviously written his own life, had another novel in him.

His new book, *The Partisan*,[1] answers that question, for it is in many ways the same novel, though less good. It is another variation on the John Cheever/Benjamin Cheever story, but more fictionalized and correspondingly diluted in emotion and power.

This time the father figure is Jonas Collingwood, an elderly author of gloomy, obscure novels. The "son," Nelson, and his sexually precocious sister have in fact been adopted and brought up by Jonas and his wife (whom they call Uncle and Aunt). The family—or rather the approximation of a family—live in a cottage on the Rockefeller estate in Westchester County. They have coexisted in reasonable harmony until two occurrences bring the situation to a crisis. The first is the arrival of an alternative son-

1 *The Partisan*, by Benjamin Cheever; Atheneum, 261 pages, $21.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

figure for Jonas: John Gilbert, a clever, ambitious writer in his thirties who aspires to become Jonas's literary executor and biographer. He is the archetypal usurper, ousting Nelson from his rightful place as son, heir, and companion to Jonas, oozing smarminess: "I can't tell you how much I admire your uncle's writing," he says to Nelson. "He's one of the only men alive today whose style is truly lapidary."

The second change in the *status quo* is brought about by Jonas's new publishers. Until now, his novels have been put out by a firm specializing in agricultural catalogues; Jonas is the only "prestige" writer on the list. The firm is bought out by a large conglomerate, which decides that Jonas is to become a best seller, the "Hemingway of Westchester." He unexpectedly agrees to sign a contract to write a blockbuster about his war experiences, in order to give the advance money, as it happens, to the woman he has always secretly loved.

The themes of the novel are paternity and responsibility, with Jonas as the central, inscrutable figure. As a parent he both accepts and rejects: he allows Nelson the respect any polite man might accord a stranger, but gives him no special treatment. The usurper, Gilbert, is allowed the same filial rights as Nelson—a terrible act of parental rejection, it might seem, and Nelson's sense of rejection is intensified when he learns a secret about his origins.

Though Jonas Collingwood is a more benign figure than Icarus Prentice, the story once again is that of a young man cripplingly tethered to the talent of an older one, of a father who will neither acknowledge and love his son nor set him free. Jonas and Icarus paralyze their sons with indifference. But where *The Plagiarist* vibrated with powerful tremors of rage, *The Partisan* is diffuse, foggy with tolerance. Jonas and his family even veer dangerously close to cuteness; in its meandering first half the story threatens to be a wacky tale of lovable eccentrics. Thankfully, it is much more than that, but Cheever erodes his narrative's power by softening its focus.

When one thinks of heirs to Updike and Cheever, the name of Nicholson Baker naturally comes to mind. Not necessarily because there's truth in the comparison—Baker has left Cheever Country far behind—but because he has so eagerly claimed that place for himself. In 1991 he published *U and I*, a book-length tirade on his own obsession with Updike: he didn't just admire Updike, or revere him, or want to play golf with him, he wanted to *be* him! Even the coincidence of the two men's both suffering from psoriasis had to *mean* something, on the cosmic level—Baker and Updike were soulmates! Baker knows all about the anxiety of influence, though he hasn't read Harold Bloom: "Am I simply resaying things he's already said?" he asks. "'Adding texture'?"

The book is funny, of course, and Baker succeeds in disarming the reader by camouflaging the magnificent presumption of comparing his unknown, thirty-two-year-old self with the distinguished Updike in a flurry of neurotic goofiness. "I am nobody," he hastens to assure the reader; "fame (not to speak of talent) hasn't conferred any external interest on my writhings." He presents himself as a nerdy kid, enthusiastic, confessional: he irrationally resents Updike for befriending another young writer; he admits to conducting imaginary interviews with *The Paris Review*. Nevertheless, the presumption is real, and Baker backs it up with truly dazzling (if small-scale) displays of literary gymnastics. Erudition, too. For Baker is aware, if the reader is not, that Updike's own cynosure was Nabokov, as Nabokov's was Proust, and that in noisily setting himself alongside Updike he is tacitly placing himself in a larger, European tradition.

U and I caught the attention it sought. Baker went from being a relatively unknown figure, the author of two well-reviewed but low-profile novels,[2] to being a trendy up-and-comer. His gifts were obvious, he worked the publicity machine with skill, and he seemed poised on the brink of a very considerable success.

---

2 *The Mezzanine* (1988) and *Room Temperature* (1990).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

However, *Vox* (1992) wasn't it. It was a marketing triumph, of course, and well-written. But it fell far short of Baker's potential. He had started with an interesting if self-limiting idea: a young man and woman in distant cities have an encounter on a sex hot-line that leads to a one-on-one, two-hour conversation. Written entirely in dialogue, the book explores the nature of the sexual dynamic in fluid and often beautiful prose. But the whole thing is a little too consciously stylized, too graceful, too Madison Avenue; the Nineties reader is being condescendingly catered to.

Baker's new book, *The Fermata*,[3] proves beyond doubt that he has lost his way, perhaps for good. He has thrown away the respect he should have accorded his own talent and become a mere pornographer. The term "pornography" has a confused history in our culture, so let me be concise. There isn't much here *but* pornography. *The Fermata* is no *Lolita*; it is no *Portnoy's Complaint*; it is no *Candy*. At moments it is pleasing as science fiction or fantasy, somewhat on the level of last year's clever film *Groundhog Day*. But otherwise it's porn, stretched out to an intolerably tedious length.

The plot: Arno Strine is a thirty-five-year-old office temp. He is single since his girlfriend left him, a solitary, pleasant, bookish young man. Arno has an amazing gift: he is able to stop time at will. He uses this talent only for sexual, generally voyeuristic purposes. Sometimes he merely wants to see a particular woman naked. Then he will stop time (he calls these periods of non-time the "Fold" or the "Fermata," hence the title) and undress the object of his lust. Sometimes he wants to see more than flesh. Then he might undress the woman and insert a sex toy in her underwear, so as to see the look of pleasure on her face when he starts time up again. Sometimes he uses the Fold to enter a woman's house so that he can hide there and watch while she masturbates. He occasionally uses the Fold as a pickup device, as with his ex-girlfriend: when he first saw her, she was reading a book in a restaurant, and he stopped time in order to check out the notes she was writing in the margins, so as later to be able to amaze her with his incredible insights, so similar to her own. What Arno does in the Fold, he says, is act out his "perennial wish to insert some novelty into the lives of women."

This is the feminist Nineties, of course, so Arno doesn't resort to anything so crude as rape; he hardly even cops a squeeze. He savors his Fold adventures purely as aesthetic experiences, given moral luster by virtue of his having put a little romance into some poor woman's dreary life. There is a message, of sorts:

> I haven't been punished for it, either. Dr. Jekyll, Faustus, Stravinsky's soldat, the ballet dancer in *The Red Shoes*, Gollum, Wells's invisible man and time traveler, Dr. Frankenstein, and a thousand more recent horror heroes all master some quasi-supernatural power and are punished for it, worn out by it, destroyed by it. How false and wearisome this outcome is. Why should a life with some unusual metaphysical feature built into it inevitably end in unhappiness and early death? Why should all the heroes have some fatal flaw that causes them to overreach and hence to self-destruct? It's too convenient.

There is also a resolution to the plot, such as it is: far from being punished for his wayward life, Arno meets and gets the girl of his dreams. But the ending of *The Fermata* is rushed, as though Baker can no longer be bothered with plot; he has shot his wad, so to speak, on the erotics, and lost interest in the superstructure.

Summing it all up makes the book sound dumb. Baker, however, is anything but dumb. Even at its most vacuous, *The Fermata* is a very clever book, and Baker's virtuosity as a stylist is apparent on almost every page. *The Fermata* is provocatively Nabokovian, with Arno self-consciously taking on the voice of Humbert Humbert, as in the following passage:

3 *The Fermata*, by Nicholson Baker; Random House, 303 pages, $21.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> [The] notion of self-centrifugation did and does have a powerful appeal, and I sometimes have the distinct sense, as I hover in the middle of a page of this memoir, choosing which of my past Fermatas I will relate next, that in order to write my life properly I need the entire receptacle of my consciousness spun, as the ultracentrifuge's rotor spins its vials of biological freight. . . . I want all of the semi-remembered images of half-dressed women, all these fragments of my voyeuristic history, that still remain in messy colloidal suspension to fly around at the speed of insight until they are compelled to file themselves away once and for all into neat radial gradients of macromolecular uniformity, like layered cocktails or fancy multicolored creations in Jell-O.

This, of course, is pure exhibitionism, and Baker tosses it off at frequent intervals. But it is also indicative of his real virtuosity. Baker is prolifically talented; he is one of the few members of my own generation whom I have thought indubitably to possess the ingredients of a major writer, the equal at least of a Philip Roth, or even, yes, a John Updike. But if he continues on the path he has cleared for himself, he will throw everything away. He will find himself in the position of his hero Arno Strine, the possessor of wonderful powers who yet remains hopelessly mired in banality.

Two young writers who have recently published second novels possess less surface brilliance than Baker but write with an emotional power and moral acuity that gives their work a sustaining value. Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* and Douglas Hobbie's *The Day* are distinguished examples of the WASP tradition in the novel: both, interestingly enough, take place over Thanksgiving, a holiday that seems particularly fraught for the upper classes.

Rick Moody grew up in New Canaan, Connecticut, in the 1970s. He attended St. Paul's and Brown University, worked in publishing, and wrote his first novel, *Garden State* (1992), which is about working-class kids in New Jersey. He was clearly avoiding his own roots. "Sometimes admitting to my origins in the suburbs feels like admitting to some great impropriety," he now says. "It feels like a white-collar crime or like a family secret." *Garden State* was successful—it won the Pushcart Press Editor's Book Award—but fortunately a friend persuaded Moody to mine the rich material of his own upbringing. Moody accepted the challenge (following the hackneyed but valuable dictum to "write about what you know") and began work on his new novel. Venturing onto suburban territory, he was well aware of his antecedents: in fact, *The Ice Storm* can be seen as a pointed response to Updike's *Rabbit* tetralogy.[4] Updike was dealing with the journey of Rabbit's own generation; what happened to the kids was tangential, though the troubled presence of Rabbit's son Nelson haunts the books. Moody is attacking the same situation from the opposing angle. What is happening to the kids while the parents go their self-indulgent way of alcoholism and adultery?

It is Thanksgiving Friday, 1973, and Moody sets the scene. "Abbie Hoffman was in hiding. . . . Jerry Rubin was writing for the *New Age Journal*. Angela Davis had been acquitted. The Beatles were recording solo albums. The war in neutral Cambodia was heating up. (The Khmer Rouge would take Phnom Penh. Lon Nol would soon be deposed.) The energy crisis was getting under way."

Two New Canaan families are linked by friendship and adultery. The Hoods, Benjamin and Elena, Paul and Wendy; the Williamses, Janey and Jim, Mike and Sandy. The parents are fortyish. Benjamin Hood's "minuscule eyes were the color of antifreeze. . . . He resembled a longtime funeral director or a salesman of bogus waterfront property. He knew this." Elena, repressed daughter of the Eisenhower years, is silent and thoughtful. By herself, she reads and reads: *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and *The Primal Scream* and *Games People Play* and *Be*

4 *The Ice Storm*, by Rick Moody; Little, Brown, 279 pages, $19.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here Now and *Human Sexual Response* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. She is searching. She and Benjamin have not had sex in a year and a half. "When she saw his penis now, as he showered or dressed for work, she felt no more for it than she felt for any plucked and headless game bird." Janey Williams, emotionally estranged from her self-involved husband, is on the prowl. She is having an affair with Benjamin for lack of anyone better. Paul Hood is sixteen, Wendy fourteen. Paul is perpetually stoned at his New Hampshire prep school; Wendy is drifting into an experimental sex life. Fourteen-year-old Mike Williams and his slightly younger brother, Sandy, are both learning about sex with Wendy. It's not that the kids' parents aren't loving and concerned, at least by their standards; it's just that their standards turn out to be pretty inadequate.

The central event is a "key party" the adults attend on Friday night. Key parties were tribal rites of the swinging Seventies: the husbands would drop their housekeys into a bowl, wives would choose a set of keys from the cluster, and couples would recouple accordingly, for that night. Did it all really stop after that, everyone going happily back to their spouses? "Whispers, that fall, at cocktail parties or on the paddle-tennis courts, spoke of unsubstantiated liaisons between those whose night of passion was intended to be singular, unique, unrepeatable." (Like Rabbit Angstrom, whose own long-term affair, it will be remembered, began at a similar gathering.)

Moody's description of the party is full of marvelous period details. There is the Episcopalian minister who is into EST: "Everything in heaven is fashioned from the mutability of these options constructed in your flow, whether with consciousness or unconsciousness. And that means that your feet rest in heaven. As Werner says, *you are* the higher power, the supreme being. You are." There's the music played at this well-heeled suburban party: the theme from the Tribal Love Rock Musical *Hair*. Best of all is Moody's insertion of the reality factor into the whole scene, as when Elena looks over her potential partners for the evening: she "couldn't imagine whom, of the assembled, she could stand."

While the adults are cutting these capers, the children are abandoned to their own devices. Paul, in the city, consumes a vile combination of drugs and alcohol and tries to crash Max's Kansas City in the company of a beautiful preppie who also has been abandoned by her family on Thanksgiving. He spends the night in bitter cold on the commuter train, which has been paralyzed by an ice storm. Mike wanders through wintry New Canaan alone. Wendy and Sandy romp on the Williamses water bed and have an adventure involving sex and alcohol.

Tragedy occurs: one of the children dies, a symbolic sacrifice to the parents' self-indulgence. Again, this harks back to *Rabbit* and the death of the baby Rebecca Angstrom—the sacrifice of Iphigenia, as Updike has put it. The parents are not directly responsible, but they have spiritually neglected their children, a failure that will haunt them forever. As with Benjamin Cheever's *The Partisan*, *The Ice Storm*'s theme is ultimately parental responsibility. America's suburban children, Moody implies, have been ill-served by their parents' emotional defection. And, though they indulge most of their own whims, the parents themselves are ill-served. As Benjamin Hood says, "loneliness is the music of the spheres around here."

In fact the parents, who spend so much of their time in the fashionable Seventies study of "belief systems," have in effect no belief system of their own. They don't even possess the vocabulary to enunciate their beliefs; as with Marquand's George Apley, emotion is not a language they speak. After shouting at Wendy and Sandy for their sexual misdeeds, Jim Williams tries to explain away his own night, spent on the waterbed with Elena:

> "Now, sometimes as a marriage gets familiar it starts to age a little bit—this happens sometimes. It just happens that the people who are married—like your mother and I, Sandy, or Benjamin and Elena—get to a point when they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> want a little something in their marriage. They get to a point when they find themselves, uh, straying away. Look, it's not that complicated. It's sort of the way you might want A.1. sauce on your burger one week and mustard the next. It's that simple. . . . So we can do this if we want. We can bend these bonds a little bit; we can borrow somebody else for a night and not have it . . . without endangering our families or anything. Borrow out of affection, right?"

In Moody's novel tragedy and farce mix as casually as they do in nature. Emotion and irony are complementary, not opposed. Here *The Ice Storm* is greatly superior to Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*, another recent suburban tragedy. Eugenides cheapens his territory by making it campy; Moody attacks it on its own terms.

Less angry than Moody—less wounded, perhaps—Douglas Hobbie confronts the betrayals of family and the vicissitudes of the American bourgeoisie with tolerance and subtle humor. His first novel, *Boomfell*, was published in 1991. It placed two characters in opposition: Charles Boomfell, a failed academic and writer who has slipped into a comfortable if unexciting life as a real-estate salesman, and Eliot Singer, his former colleague, a successful careerist who has had a nervous breakdown and rejected his own middle-class existence. Through Singer's eyes Boomfell sees his own life in a new light, and is led to question its values while coming, ultimately, to accept it with all its imperfections. The series of compromises that make up the average life—compromises at work, in marriage, in love—are unsatisfactory, but in a sane life they are perhaps all that is possible.

Hobbie's new novel, *The Day*, focuses upon the same sort of people.[5] Like Boomfell, Jack Fletcher is a child of affluence confronting the possibility of downward mobility. He is an architect, having a tough time in the recession. He has rejected both city and suburbs and lives in a pleasant university town, "an enlightened place, a kind of rural city, . . . with bookstores, good bread, okay restaurants, and constant concerts, readings, performances, exhibits, etc. . . . a mecca for artsy, politically correct, entrepreneurial, environmentalist types." Fletcher and his extended family are New England WASPs, the kind that cross-country ski, patronize L. L. Bean, and spend a lot of time gardening and working on their house.

"The Day" of the title is Thanksgiving, which Jack, Gwen, and their two children are as usual to spend with Gwen's family: her parents, Curly and Patricia, her sister and brother-in-law, Penny and Peter, their children, and a young visitor, Liz. What makes this Thanksgiving different from the last is that since that time Gwen and Penny's eldest sister, Clare, has killed herself.

Jack cared very much for Clare; in fact he had a brief affair with her years ago and continued to love her in a more or less platonic way for the rest of her life. He is determined that the family be forced to acknowledge the loss of Clare, to remember her this Thanksgiving, not to gloss over the event as they gloss over every unpleasant thing that has ever happened. But in determining this, Jack reveals himself as an innocent, fundamentally at odds with WASP decorum. If he were not, he would realize that the reason they don't talk about Clare is not that they lack love for her but that they find her death unbearably painful.

This, of course, is the custom of the country: everything is in the subtext, nothing in the text. What is discussed is trivial; what is left unsaid is all that matters. Patricia, the matriarch, embodies this rule. Her daughter Penny has been reading a book about the end of civilization, and is trying to describe it over the turkey and stuffing:

> "The title happens to be the survival of . . . but maybe it should be called the end, Jack. The point, quite simply, is that the whole shebang will be over before we know it if mankind doesn't wake up. In this context everything

5 *The Day*, by Douglas Hobbie; A John Macrae Book/Holt, 241 pages, $22.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> else, everything happening in the world, is—"
>
> "Oh, Penny, why do you waste your time?" her mother asked . . .
>
> "Presumably, the tropics, like the equatorial region, will survive as the source of new life once the glacier . . . I guess it grinds the earth's crust to dust, which is carried over the surface by winds, remineralizing—"
>
> "For the love of God, Penny," her mother said, "don't you have better things to worry about?"

Patricia concerns herself passionately with life's surfaces—clothes, manners, decoration; her corresponding fear of emotion and unpleasantness is palpable. The result is a general unspoken agreement never to bring up such matters. So, Jack reasons,

> you'd never breathe a word to the woman about alcohol, sex, teenage insomnia, never breathe a word to your own mother about something real, so by the time your kids were teenagers, the whole family was leading a secret life and these folks who cared about you more than anything in the world didn't have a clue about what was really going on and didn't want to know.

The family gathering is a fairly uneventful one, as seen through Jack's eyes. There are a few quarrels; some unexplained tears from Penny; Jack has a titillating dalliance with Liz. It is not until he and his family are driving home that he realizes anything out of the ordinary is going on. Gwen berates him for his obtuseness: how could he be so insensitive, how could he not *know* what everyone was going through? It so happens that Curly had recently been diagnosed with cancer, that Penny had temporarily left Peter, having returned only for a trial period, and that Liz's mother had committed suicide.

Jack is thunderstruck. "He had been present and not present, in a manner of speaking, so that now Thanksgiving at Penny's consisted of the day and the day he had missed." He has spent his life as a WASP in a WASP family, but has remained amazingly naïve, naïve enough to believe that the people he loves will actually discuss their problems with him: "Five, ten, fifteen years I'm sitting there one goddam Thanksgiving after another, the invisible man, as far as anyone's concerned. Everything's going to hell and I'm not even informed. These are the people in my life, some of them anyway."

After the Fletchers get home Jack mulls for a while over the day's revelations. He experiences a kind of epiphany in which he realizes how much he loves these people. He telephones Penny's house, speaking to each of them in turn—Peter, Penny, Curly, Liz, the kids—to tell them how much he cares for them, how deeply he is affected by their problems. Predictably, his emotion only makes them suspicious. "Did you call up to be sarcastic?" they ask. "Are you drunk?"

Hobbie has captured the dynamics of this particular type of family to a T, and *The Day* is extremely funny as well as moving. A few of Hobbie's techniques can be annoying. His conceit of basing his story on Joyce's "The Dead" makes for unnecessary hardware. Hobbie's story stands well on its own, and does not require any extra structuring from Joyce. Besides, this trick is getting a little tired; I even saw a version of "The Dead" on "thirtysomething." Likewise, Fletcher frequently waxes a little too Bloomian in his stream-of-consciousness monologue. But though Hobbie is steeped in Joyce, he is a gentle, unpretentious writer and has avoided the excesses that Joyceanism often engenders. Hobbie's strength lies in his simplicity: sometimes, like his hero Fletcher, he is almost too simple, but it is to his simplicity finally that he owes his striking moral vision.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

Women beware women

by Heather Mac Donald

By most any measure of success, the Eighties were a very good decade for American women. Their earnings relative to men continued to rise; indeed, women made more economic progress during the last decade than during the entire postwar period before that. Women now earn more bachelor's and master's degrees than men and continue to increase their share of doctorates. They have broken down virtually all barriers to the professions and business. Far from being a disability, their gender has become an unbeatable qualification. Women are eagerly sought after for membership on corporate boards, for college presidencies, and for political appointments. In Congress, their voice possesses a moral authority that sends terror into the hearts of potential opponents. And regarding marriage, childbirth, and personal morality, American women enjoy a freedom that remains the envy of the world.

This is not, however, the picture that dominates the media. Every few months, a story breaks portraying the harrowing life that is the American woman's. Dying off in droves through self-inflicted starvation, battered and raped by husbands and boyfriends, oppressed by a crippling burden of self-doubt, silenced by teachers and sexually harassed by colleagues and bosses, women —as the press presents them—struggle constantly against a rising tide of discrimination and violence.

This immense gap between the reality of women's lives and their image in the media is the triumphant accomplishment of what Christina Hoff Sommers, in her brilliant new book, *Who Stole Feminism?*, calls "gender feminism." [1] Gender feminism is dedicated to the proposition that women are the perpetual victims of an oppressive male system—the "patriarchy"—that robs them of their voice, their identity, and their strength. The patriarchy, gender feminists charge, keeps women in thrall through violence and the threat of violence; nowhere, they warn, is this threat greater than in the home.

Gender feminism is a far cry from "equity feminism," Sommers's term for the original women's movement, which sought and won full legal rights for women. Though equity feminism is responsible for women's present freedoms, gender feminists will have none of it. The entire "system," they argue, must be overthrown, and with it, "male" concepts of equality, justice, and individual rights.

Sommers, an associate professor of philosophy at Clark University, has been our most indispensable chronicler of the feminist follies. In her dispatches from women's studies conferences, she has exposed with lacerating wit the maudlin self-pity and crackpot philosophical theories that characterize academic feminism. She continues that role in *Who Stole Feminism?*, presenting

1 *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*, by Christina Hoff Sommers; Simon & Schuster, 320 pages, $23.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a picture of an educational system gone completely mad, in which students earn college credit by performing "outrageous" and "liberating" feminist acts outside of class and a homegrown Red Guard enforces feminist ideological conformity against professors and fellow students with the blessing of college administrators.

But in *Who Stole Feminism?* Sommers also proves to be an exemplary sleuth. She tracks down the various sexism scares that have recently dominated the media—the destruction of girls' self-esteem, their mistreatment by teachers and their silencing by the curriculum, the prevalence of acquaintance rape and battery, the "backlash" against feminism, women's unyielding earnings gap relative to men, the ubiquity of severe depression among women—and discovers that each at its origin is phony. Either the claim is based on laughably unscientific research methods or it constitutes a misreading of valid data. Yet the press, ever credulous when it comes to charges against the white-male patriarchy, has almost without exception taken the sexism patrols at their word and duly broadcast their "findings" without further investigation. These then become part of the feminist arsenal for future use against the patriarchy.

These media scares are the product of what Sommers calls the "victim/bias industry." Spanning the universities, schools, think tanks, foundations, polling organizations, and government bureaucracies, the victim/bias industry provides gender feminists with a constant stream of anti-woman horror stories and thus a constant source of employment as bias monitors and gender-equity experts.

It works as follows: First, feminist academics and pollsters crank out advocacy research demonstrating women's victimization. Then activist organizations like NOW and the Ms. Foundation and formerly nonpartisan academic organizations like the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and the Association of American Colleges (AAC) repackage the findings in attractive and easily digestible brochures and videos, burying the original research beyond all human contact. A publicity blitz follows. Hundreds of news outlets pick up the charge, relying exclusively on the sponsoring organization's publicity brochures for information about the original research. Conferences, protests, and legislative hearings ensue, resulting in increased funding for gender research and gender bureaucrats.

Two related studies of secondary schools commissioned by the AAUW followed this pattern to bear spectacular legislative fruit: the introduction in Congress in 1993 of a $360 million Gender Equity in Education Act. According to Sommers, the Act would put paid gender monitors in every primary and secondary school in the country, and harassment officers in every secondary school and college. Most of the Act has passed the House; it is still pending in the Senate. The wording of the bill simply parrots the AAUW's publicity materials on its two studies; Sommers reveals that those materials and the studies behind them are wholly unreliable.

In 1991 the AAUW sprang upon the world the findings of a study it had commissioned on boys' and girls' self-esteem. In its widely distributed "Call to Action" brochures and videos, it trumpeted a "dramatic" drop in female self-esteem between the ages of eleven and sixteen, proof that schools were destroying girls' very identities. The usual public alarum followed, leading to hundreds of self-esteem conferences and community-action projects.

After considerable effort, Sommers located the original poll upon which the AAUW's "Call to Action" brochures were based. Those brochures had claimed that only 29 percent of female high-school students say they are "happy the way [they are]," as compared with 46 percent of the boys—a drop of 31 female self-esteem points from elementary school. Sommers discovered that the figures cited in the brochure represented only the percentage of students answering "always true" to the statement "I am happy the way I am." If one includes the answers,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"sort of true" and "sometimes true/sometimes false," 88 percent of the girls polled answered positively, as opposed to 92 percent of the boys —hardly an earthshaking gender gap. That leaves at most 12 percent of the girls who answered "sort of false," or "always false," the only answers upon which a claim of low self-esteem could plausibly be based.

Equally important, every researcher with whom Sommers spoke challenged both the research methodology and the conclusions. Many question whether "self-esteem" can be measured and whether it even exists at all. People's expressed opinions of themselves may have little to do with their sense of self-worth, yet the AAUW relied almost exclusively on self-reports. The AAUW's conclusions from those self-reports contradict the consensus in the field of child psychology that most children come through adolescence with an increase in self-worth.

The most damning finding which Sommers dug up from the original poll, however, is that the group which scores highest on the AAUW's self-esteem measure is black boys, followed by black girls—the two groups who fare worst in all measures of academic achievement. Internationally, the only area in which American children outscore other countries is self-esteem. Asian students express far less confidence in their math abilities than Americans do, yet they trounce us in math. Sommers concludes quite persuasively that the true relation between reported self-esteem and academic performance may be an inverse one.

Indeed, girls—allegedly the victims of a self-esteem deficit—consistently outperform boys in every aspect of school: grades, attendance, self-discipline, and extracurricular activities. This is the sort of fact which must be suppressed at all costs. So the AAUW, buoyed by the enormous attention its self-esteem brochure garnered, commissioned a follow-up study from the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women on *how* schools are destroying girls' self-esteem. This study met with an even more gratifying response in the press—more than fourteen hundred stories—culminating in the introduction of the Gender Equity in Education Act.

The Wellesley report, "How Schools Shortchange Girls," charged that schools subject girls to incessant gender bias, ranging from lack of attention by teachers to sexual harassment to discrimination in the curriculum. Locating the research on which the first of these claims—unequal teacher attention—was based proved even more difficult than locating the self-esteem poll. Tracking through pseudo-academic journals that had never seen the light of day, Sommers uncovered a web of false leads and non-existent studies that would be the envy of most professional money launderers. As usual, she came up empty-handed. The data allegedly showing unequal teacher attention have never been published in numerical form, and are based on wholly subjective research methods. Most educational psychologists believe that teachers respond to the nature of student behavior, not to the gender of the student. And the very researchers the Wellesley report cited for the proposition that teachers discriminate against girls have themselves admitted that there is no evidence linking teacher behavior and student performance. As for the report's charge that girls were being continually harassed, Sommers discovered that boys are nearly as likely to report being harassed as girls, suggesting that the incivility and aggression in many schools are gender neutral.

The most worrisome aspect of "How Schools Shortchange Girls," however, is its advocacy of curricular reform. While the charges of teacher bias and student harassment will result in the hiring of additional gender bureaucrats, such "corrective" measures will not fundamentally change the nature of learning and the definition of knowledge. The report's curricular recommendations, however, will. Those recommendations grow out of the most dangerous aspect of academic feminism: the curricular transformation movement.

Curricular transformation seeks to recast knowledge itself in a "female-centered"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mode. Its main targets are such "masculinist" forms of thinking as logic, mathematical reasoning, and scientific research. These "phallocentric" enterprises are said to embody a win-lose approach to learning characterized by right and wrong answers to problems. The curricular transformationists would replace this zero-sum approach with a win-win philosophy in which presumably all answers are welcomed into the great circle of feminine intuition.

Despite its aversion to analytical thinking, the curricular transformation movement promotes a host of wacky typologies. One of the most popular is the distinction between "vertical" and "lateral" thinking. According to Peggy McIntosh, one of the leading theorists of curricular transformation, "vertical thinkers"—i.e., males—aim at "exact thinking, or decisiveness or mastery of something." Vertical thinking, says McIntosh, is "triggered by words like excellence, accomplishment, success, and achievement." In its place, the transformationists would foster the "lateral thinking" practiced by women and minorities. Such thinking is "relational [and] inclusive"; it aims "not to win, but to be in a decent relationship with the invisible elements of the universe."

The transformationists may not yet have achieved a decent relationship with the universe, but their relationship with major funding sources is enviable. The Ford Foundation recently helped launch a National Clearinghouse for Curriculum Transformation Resources. Federal agencies as well as state governments generously support the cause. The Wellesley College Center for Research on Women has a multimillion-dollar budget; the AAC has $4.5 million for curricular transformation. Not surprisingly, transformation projects are springing up at colleges across the country.

Peggy McIntosh also happens to head the Wellesley Center. Small wonder, then, that the Center's "How Schools Shortchange Girls" study embraced McIntosh's own influential five-phase theory of curricular development.

That theory presents a teleological analysis of curricula from masculinist damnation to feminist beatitude. At the lowest stage of development, instructors focus on "mountain" or "pinnacle people"—leaders who make the laws, fight the wars, and occupy, in McIntosh's words, the "tops of the ladders of so-called success . . . and excellence."

Phase II begins when instructors notice the absence of women and minorities in their teaching materials. But their initial response is sadly inadequate: they merely add a few "exceptional" women and minorities to the males milling around on top of the mountain without challenging the concept of "so-called excellence."

By Phase III, however, things start to heat up. "Phase III curriculum work involves getting angry," says McIntosh. The focus is on victimized groups. Instead of presenting America as a meritocracy in which individuals can achieve success, the instructor shows how "patterns of colonialism, imperialism and genocide outside the U.S. match patterns of domination, militarism and genocide at home."

Phase IV becomes mystical: "It produces courses in which we are all seen to be in it together, . . . all with some power to say no, and yes, and 'This I create.' . . . Phase IV classes can be wondrous in their healing power," intones McIntosh.

But Phase V transcends the verbal power of even the most vociferous feminist. According to McIntosh, it is "as yet unthinkable"; she breathlessly calls it "Reconstructed Global and Biological History to Survive By."

As Sommers's review of developments in academia makes disturbingly clear, McIntosh's schema is no mere speculative fancy. It accurately describes changes that have already taken place. Many colleges have long since instituted Phase III "anger" courses and are now experimenting with Phase IV "healing" classes. From its inception, women's studies embraced an anger agenda. Other disciplines soon followed suit: literature, history, sociology, art history, and anthropology among others are often now taught toward the end of raising conscious-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness of oppression. Increasingly, academic activism is no longer an option. According to Sommers, many college administrations have adopted phase theories of curricula to evaluate faculty: Professors still stuck in Phase I are finding promotion and tenure even more elusive than usual. The Gender Equity in Education Act may make progress on curricular transformation a national mandate.

But curricular transformation contains its own internal contradictions. Though McIntosh envisions moving beyond Phase III anger, this may prove difficult. Anger is for the gender feminist a sign of election; it must be as carefully tended as a vestal fire. A woman who is not angry, according to gender feminists, is a woman brainwashed. Women's studies courses have mechanisms structured into them to ensure that resentment against men remains high. Part of the coursework consists of personal testimonials to one's humiliation at the hands of the patriarchy. In a widely adopted women's studies curriculum, students sign a set of ground-rules agreeing that "oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, classism) exists" and that we are all systematically taught misinformation about it. Given the centrality of anger to the gender feminist's definition of an enlightened woman, it is likely that Phase III will remain a vital part of the college experience for some time to come. The "healing" aspects of Phase IV will be largely confined to the licking of feminist wounds.

At last check, America's schools were not doing a notable job at Phase I: teaching and promoting excellence and achievement. Curricular transformation now proclaims that those were the wrong goals anyway. If ever there was an educational movement to gladden the hearts of our country's foreign competitors, curricular transformation is it. The nascent push for "national standards" of high-school achievement doesn't stand a chance against the gender-feminist celebration of the lowest common denominator. Any advocate of a strict and demanding curriculum will be outgunned by an army of feminist professors and administrators and their allies in the legislative arena.

But if gender feminism is antithetical to academic excellence, it is a disaster for women. Sommers drily observes that gender feminism is rushing to institutionalize the very stereotypes of feminine irrationality and vulnerability that women once fought to dispel. Sommers finds in the gender feminists' revulsion at male "patriarchal" behavior an echo of an outdated sensibility:

> Earlier in this century, many households still had smelling salts on hand in the event that "delicate" women reacted to displays of male vulgarity by fainting. Today, women of delicacy . . . demonstrate their exquisitely fragile sensibilities by explaining to anyone who will listen how they have been blighted and violated by some male's offensive coarseness. If nothing of a telling nature has recently happened to us, we can tell how we felt on hearing what happened to others. We faint, "discursively" and publicly, at our humiliations at the hands of men.

Sommers calls on women to reaffirm the vision of equity feminism. It is up to women, she says, to reassert their individuality against gender-feminist propaganda, for few men will be willing to brave the charge of "sexist" to counter that propaganda. With a book as lucidly written and compellingly argued as *Who Stole Feminism?*, Sommers should win many allies to her cause.

The abyss stares back

Gertrude Himmelfarb
On Looking into the Abyss:
Untimely Thoughts
on Culture and Society.
Knopf, 192 pages, $23

reviewed by Terry Teachout

Those who casually dismiss Holocaust deniers as psychotic are missing the point. Outright denial is merely the most straight-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forward of a variety of unsavory responses to the Holocaust that have emerged in recent years. The Holocaust, after all, is the most awkward fact in twentieth-century history. All roads lead to it, and many go no farther. Economic determinism, the aestheticization of history, the denial by liberals of the existence of evil, even the very idea of progress itself: such shibboleths of modern thought look uniformly and unutterably foolish when weighed in the balance with the burnt corpses of six million Jews. For anyone who nonetheless persists in espousing such stylish notions, the Holocaust is, to borrow from the phrasebook of the KGB, an "unwanted witness."

Small wonder, then, that those who find the reality of the Holocaust impossible to square with their own views should seek to do to it what the KGB did to its own unwanted witnesses (and what many Western intellectuals labored mightily to do to the memory of the forty million people murdered by the KGB). Hence Holocaust denial. Hence, too, Holocaust "minimization," a staple item of latter-day radical black rhetoric to which the American public at large was introduced by Khalid Muhammad's notorious speech at Howard University, an event which left progressive-minded journalists scrambling to find new ways to define black anti-Semitism down. And—perhaps most insidious of all—hence the "deconstruction" of the Holocaust to which the most daring of postmodernist historians have lately turned their hands.

In assembling the essays collected in *On Looking into the Abyss*, Gertrude Himmelfarb was initially surprised to find that nearly all of them made prominent mention of the Holocaust. This, she says in her introduction, "was not anticipated or consciously intended by me. Yet it now seems to me perfectly natural and proper. In almost every essay, the Holocaust stands as a rebuke to historians, philosophers, and literary critics who, in their zeal for one or another of the intellectual fashions of our time, belittle or demean one of the greatest tragedies of all time."

Himmelfarb's title refers to the famous passage from *Beyond Culture* in which Lionel Trilling told how his Columbia College students reacted to their first exposure to the "prolegomenal works" of modernism, among them *The Birth of Tragedy*, the book in which Nietzsche warned that "whoever, in pride of knowledge, hurls nature into the abyss of destruction, must himself experience nature's disintegration":

> I asked them to look into the Abyss, and, both dutifully and gladly, they have looked into the Abyss, and the Abyss has greeted them with the grave courtesy of all objects of serious study, saying: "Interesting, am I not? And *exciting*, if you consider how deep I am and what dread beasts lie at my bottom. Have it well in mind that a knowledge of me contributes materially to your being whole, or well-rounded, men."

Like Trilling's naïve students of three decades ago, today's academic intellectuals view the abyss as a clean, well-lighted pit inhabited by friendly beasts, a place where all values are relative and all "truths" scrupulously pluralized and imprisoned within the barbed wire of inverted commas. The only difference is the stakes: "The beasts of modernism," writes Himmelfarb, "have mutated into the beasts of postmodernism—relativism into nihilism, amorality into immorality, irrationality into insanity, sexual deviancy into polymorphous perversity." For Himmelfarb, the most telling symbol of the moral trivialization wrought upon Western culture by postmodernism is the way in which its historians, taking their cue from Paul de Man and Martin Heidegger (both of whom, in the most exquisite of ironies, are now known to have been Nazi sympathizers), have begun to flirt with the "problematization" of the Holocaust.

The essence of postmodernist history, Himmelfarb explains, is "a denial of the fixity of the past, of the reality of the past apart from what the historian chooses to make of it, and thus of any objective truth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about the past." Where does the undeniable objective truth of the Holocaust fit into this slippery scheme? Himmelfarb quotes one postmodernist historian, Jane Caplan, who clearly saw the trap that awaited less prudent colleagues:

> To put it bluntly, what can one usefully say about National Socialism as an ideology or a political movement and regime via theories that appear to discount rationality as a mode of explanation, that resist the claims of truth, relativize and disseminate power, cannot assign responsibility clearly, and do not privilege (one) truth or morality over (multiple) interpretation? . . . It is one thing to embrace poststructuralism and postmodernism, to disseminate power, to decenter subjects, and all in all let a hundred kinds of meaning contend, when *Bleak House* or philology or even the archaeology of knowledge are the issue. But should the rules of contention be different when it is a question, not simply of History, but of a recent history of lives, deaths, and suffering, and the concept of a justice that seeks to draw some meaningful relation between these?

But such scruples—especially when couched in a dehydrated argot indistinguishable from self-parody—were no match for the exciting challenge of a deeper, darker abyss to plumb. In the spirit of Paul de Man (who, in the perfect phrase of David Lehman, "looked into the abyss and came away smiling"), postmodernist historians like Hayden White are now treating the Holocaust as a "metahistorical problem." Given the nature of the deconstructionist project, it is inevitable, Himmelfarb says, that the bloody reality of the Holocaust will get lost in the sterile shuffle of Marxist jargon: "The difficulty is compounded by the existence of a school of thought that relativizes, 'deprivileges,' 'decenters,' indeed, deconstructs the Holocaust so thoroughly as to deny its reality. It is this 'revisionist' thesis that postmodernists would like to avoid. But they can do so only by the kind of verbal legerdemain that is their stock-in-trade—and that has created the problem in the first place."

On Looking into the Abyss is not devoted solely to a catalogue of the sins of postmodernist historians. The seven essays collected in this slender yet indispensable volume range from a pithy reconsideration of *On Liberty* in light of the collapse of Communism (how inspiring that our finest commentator on Mill should still have fresh insights to offer thirty-two years after the publication of her seminal essay "The Other John Stuart Mill"!) to a mordantly witty dissection of the "moral lapses" inherent in the decline and fall of footnoting. But again and again Himmelfarb finds herself drawn back to the singular inability of the "new history" to account for the most important historical event of our time:

> Historians who think it the highest calling of their profession to resurrect the "daily life of ordinary people" can find little evidence in the daily life of ordinary Germans of the overwhelming fact of life—and of death—for millions of Jews; those who look for the "long-term" processes and impersonal "structures" in history tend to explain this "short-term event" in such a way as to explain it away; and those seeking to "deconstruct" the history of the Holocaust as they deconstruct all of history come perilously close to the "revisionists" who deny the reality of the Holocaust. . . . Our professors look into the abyss secure in their tenured positions, risking nothing and seeking nothing save another learned article.

One might well regret that the "preeminent Victorian" of American historians found it necessary to take time out from her own learned labors to write these occasional essays, were it not for the fact that they are so lucid and compelling a contribution to the ongoing debate over the future of American culture. The fire of justified anger warms this coolly argued polemic; it is the work of a distinguished scholar who knows well that "there is an intimate, pervasive relationship between what happens in our schools and universities, in the intellectual and artistic communities, and what happens in society and the polity," and who seeks to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

restore a measure of sanity to that relationship before it is too late. If the worst happens—assuming that it hasn't happened already—we cannot say we were not warned.

She likes a Gershwin tune

Martha Bayles Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music. The Free Press, 453 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Mark Steyn

Martha Bayles holds out till page 20 before slyly sidling into pop culture's all-purpose anthem: "At some point," she writes, "every critic tries to unpack Ellington's famous title, 'It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing.'" No need to feel so sheepish. As a distillation of the key distinction between pop music and the conservatory crowd, it's hard to beat. But is the title Ellington's? He sure enough wrote the tune, but the lyric is credited to Irving Mills, Ellington's (white) publisher, an old-school Alleyman with an eye to the main chance, who wasn't above passing off staff lyricists' work as his own and cutting himself in on the songwriting royalties.

I don't suppose Miss Bayles is aware of Mills's claim, but even if she were, who wouldn't rather believe in Ellington? On the one hand, a cool cat doodling at the keyboard and intuitively hitting upon *the* definition of what he does; on the other hand, an opportunist Tin Pan Alley hack measuring out the syllables and contriving a hit title to fit. It's no contest. But the likelihood is that the phrase is Mills's. It is, after all, in the preferred form of his opening lines: "When my sugar walks down the street/ All the birdies go tweet-tweet-tweet" or his suggestion for a novelty song about the first woman to attempt transatlantic flight, "You took a notion/ To fly across the ocean." ("Mr. Mills," his trainee lyricist Dorothy Fields protested, "nobody takes a *notion* to fly across the ocean.") To those who believe that popular music is raw, soulful, earthy, authentic, passionate, Mills is everything they despise. "There *is* a sharp dividing line," Miss Bayles writes, "between the 'folk' artist (black) and the 'bourgeois' exploiter (white)." The requirements of myth dictate that popular music's most exhilarating philosophical statement be assigned to Ellington. We make our choice, Ellington or Mills, and thereby hang our tale.

The finest achievements in pop culture are a coalescence of art, which is incidental, and craft, which is crucial. To George Gershwin, *Porgy and Bess* was an obsession, and he had no choice but to write it out. To his brother, Ira, it was a professional lyricist's latest assignment. Pop music today has its smattering of fitful artists but a conspicuous lack of craftsmen—those who provide the rules, set the standards, ensure there are minimum entry requirements. It's instinctive. When Jimmy Van Heusen and Johnny Mercer wrote "I Thought About You" . . .

> I peeped through the crack
> And looked at the track
> The one going back to you

. . . they didn't sit around figuring "Hey, this is a train song, so we need lots of monosyllables with plenty of 'k' rhymes to bounce staccato off the notes and thereby emphasize the clicketty-clack rhythm": that came naturally. Is it better than Schubert? That's up to you. But at least it's efficient. Confronted with "Fuck the Police" by Niggaz With Attitude . . .

> Searchin' my car, lookin' for the product
> Thinkin' every nigga is sellin' narcotics

. . . Mercer would barely have registered the content, but he would have raised an amused eyebrow at the attempted rhyme of "product" and "narcotics" and, more than that, would have been astounded at how the words are not, in any way, *musical* words shaped to the notes or intervals. Martha Bayles is a child of the Sixties, so it's a pleasant surprise to find that she rightly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

identifies as Bob Dylan's principal defects his "deliberate obscurity, self-indulgence, pretentiousness, and (most damning) indifference to the aural texture—the *music*—of words." He might be a great prophet, he might be America's true political opposition, he might be a handsomely bound Ivy League–approved poet, he might even have "the rude beauty of a Southern field hand musing in melody on his porch" (Robert Shelton in *The New York Times*), but he is not, on the whole, any sort of songwriter.

Miss Bayles's subtitle makes her point: "The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music." Rap, metal, grunge flaunt their lack of beauty: the ghetto sucks; kids are angry; what is there to be beautiful about? To which Miss Bayles sniffs: "London in a recession produced the Sex Pistols; Kansas City in a depression produced Count Basie." As for "meaning," by emphasizing the social context and textual analysis at the expense of the music, rock has diminished its capacity for any meaning whatsoever. To Miss Bayles, "the hardy affirmative spirit of Afro-American music"—by which she means any pop, jazz, country, blues, soul, or rock 'n' roll tune she happens to dig—has been perverted and brutalized by the influence of European intellectual poseurs.

Hole in Our Soul is a timely book, if only because popular music—or, at any rate, *popular* popular music—is dead, as dead as Kurt Cobain, a fellow most of us had never heard of until he turned up in the obituary columns. Now he's become a household name without ever having produced a household song, a model example of contemporary shortcut celebrity. It would be interesting to discuss his music, if any of us knew what it sounded like. But even the experts don't have much to say. Miss Bayles charts pop currents across the last half century without much other than her own taste, which is pretty reliable, and extensive quotations from rock's leading critics, who aren't. No matter how idiotic the rock biz is, rock criticism will always trump it. Is anything less relevant to Elvis than the respected commentator Griel Marcus? In *Mystery Train*, Marcus cites a number by the punk band X as "the best song ever written about Elvis" and drools with delight over the lyric: "man in the back says Presley sucked dicks." Miss Bayles, striving piously to concentrate on the *music*, sighs wearily: "Of all the distortions found in Marcus, the most glaring is his utter indifference to the fact that 1950s rock 'n' roll was, above all, a dance craze." For a moment, she trembles on the brink of great insight into rock 'n' roll: those who can, dance; those who can't, figure out some other explanation.

America has had some sort of popular-music business for a century and a half, but almost all its critical analysis derives from the rock generation. Miss Bayles painstakingly counters the standard misconceptions, but, as they were mostly misconceived by other cultural critics, you sometimes wonder whether you wouldn't be better off throwing the book away and settling down with a boxed set of *Reader's Digest* sing-along favorites. So she dismisses the claim that rock 'n' roll was a "revolution." But who makes this claim except the likes of *Rolling Stone*'s Robert Palmer ("it was mid-Fifties rock 'n' roll that blew away, in one mighty, concentrated blast, the accumulated racial and social proprieties of the centuries") and *Billboard* magazine, whose "Hot 100 Chart" reference books all use July 9, 1955, when Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock" hit Number One, as Year Zero of "the rock era"? But listen to the makers: Elvis admired Dean Martin and Eddie Fisher; Chuck Berry told me he wanted to sing like Nat "King" Cole. Look at the label of "Rock Around the Clock": one of the authors was born in the nineteenth century; Mitchell Parish, lyricist of "Stardust" and "Sweet Lorraine," once described it to me as "a good conventional Tin Pan Alley song." Step back a little further: the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded for RCA, and so did Elvis; Tony Bennett recorded for Columbia, and so did Bob Dylan and Michael Jackson. The corporate continuity tells its own story about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the rock 'n' roll "revolution": it's revolution Romanian-style, where the ruthless manipulative Ceauşescu figure—Mitch Miller—gets toppled and replaced by a more popular frontman, but behind the scenes all the same people are in charge. Pop music is in trouble today because the corporations have moved on, evolving computerized entertainments like Nintendo instead of nurturing the careers of flesh-and-blood entertainers.

But "Rock Around the Clock" *is* a dividing line of sorts. Before it, there was barely any serious consideration of popular music. Miss Bayles plods ponderously through the pre-criticism era, lacking bonehead rock scribes to bounce off. But it never seems to occur to her that these years—the half-century before Bill Haley—were the best that American popular music has ever known, years which saw the rise of jazz, country, and blues, an indigenous musical theater, good commercial film music, and pop songs, a few of which could reasonably claim to be the only true art songs in the English language. Ignored by *The New York Times* and Miss Bayles's predecessors at *The Wall Street Journal*, these artless artists just got on with it. Alas, critical attention would seem on the evidence to be far more harmful to popular art than any of the hedges and compromises demanded by the cloth ears of commerce. Jazz "purists" resent Louis Armstrong for ending his career growling through "Hello, Dolly!" and "What a Wonderful World," but it still beats ersatz fusion tone-poems. George Gershwin made a pile of dough hosting a radio show sponsored by a laxative and used the money to write *Porgy and Bess*; today Stephen Sondheim is told continually he's a genius, writes two shows a decade, and has seen his chosen form dwindle from American popular culture's central thruway into a forgotten little back road. Rock music seems headed the same way. Madonna—a competent disco vocalist, in Miss Bayles's assessment—has her significance pondered by earnest feminist professors, decides to pose nude on top of a German wolfhound, and finds her record sales have gone into free fall.

In the Sixties, when dawned the "ongoing cottage industry of pseudo-literary analysis" of Bob Dylan, the first generation of rock critics found it easy to write about the lyrics, which were conveniently printed on the album cover. In the Seventies, with glam and glitter and art-school androgynes and records with gatefold sleeves, they wrote about style and concept. In the Eighties, it was video images and socio-political attitudes. Rock critics will write about anything to avoid writing about the melody, the rhythm, the harmonic structure. In many cases, it's difficult, for the most direct example of pop as a vehicle for social protest is also the most uncomfortable reminder of how little the music matters. "It was lost on the revelers at Woodstock," writes Miss Bayles, "that Country Joe and the Fish's antiwar anthem 'I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die' was musically identical to 'Muskrat Ramble,' the New Orleans jazz standard by Edward ('Kid') Ory." As a *musical* interpretation, the McGuire Sisters' 1954 recording of "Muskrat Ramble" blows Country Joe and the Fish out of the water, but, poor things, because they weren't singing about Vietnam, the girls were dismissed as bland, anodyne, pre-rock dinosaurs. Rap is the logical consequence of such priorities: the reduction of the music to a banal stationary backing track, the debasement of lyric-writing to a formless pneumatic laundry list of half-baked hoodlum exhibitionism.

Popular music, supposedly the multiracial meeting place, has soured into a sterile apartheid. Of course, so have many other areas of modern life. The Writers' Union of Canada recently held a conference "limited to First Nations writers and writers of color." When persons of non-color protested about public funding of racially segregated meetings, the committee chairman helpfully explained that the notion of "color" now transcends race and embraces the realm of psychological self-definition. So, if a person of non-color felt as profoundly oppressed as a person of color, he or she would have assumed an identity that would make him or her eligible to attend. In the nineteenth cen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tury, white folks latched on to Negro songs, smeared their faces with burnt cork, and made a killing in minstrel shows. At the turn of the century, while black ragtime composers starved, white Tin Pan Alley hacks stuck "rag" in the titles of their novelty songs and sold millions. In the Fifties, R&B numbers such as "Roll With Me, Henry" were bowdlerized into "Dance With Me, Henry" by white singers who then cleaned up on the hit parade. For more than one hundred years, from the Christy Minstrels to Pat Boone, whitey has been seizing any half-decent black musical ideas and doing weedy but lucrative cover versions. If I were a person of color and casually switched on "Oprah!" and the rest, I'd reckon white folks were now doing the biggest cover version of all: appropriating my sense of profound oppression. Today, we are all victims: 50 percent of American women are date raped, 80 percent of lesbian parents are denied day-care facilities, 100 percent of celebrities are abused as children or are abusers of children or are undecided pending the outcome of their next memory-recovery session. This is the minstrel show of the alienation business, metaphorically smudging on the black-face for an easy-listening arrangement of the real thing. These days (Ellington again), we all got it bad, and that ain't good, especially when most of the oppressed are about as convincing as Pat Boone singing Fats Domino. The song is ended, but the malady lingers on; all is pose and attitude. Can white men sing the blues? No, but black men have forgotten how, too. Black or white, though, anyone can buy a metaphorical bus ticket to the ghetto. The long-term problem of rap, metal, and grunge is that—unlike Jolson, Crosby, Sinatra, Presley, the Beatles—they're strictly for losers.

Contemporary pop has graduated to the arts pages of our most sober newspapers to a degree that would have baffled Paul Dresser, Scott Joplin, George M. Cohan, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, W. C. Handy, Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller, Jimmie Rodgers, Bunny Berrigan, Woody Guthrie . . . But, almost in inverse proportion to its critical attention, popular music has become both less popular and less musical. Forget all those bogus generalizations about "energy" and "drive"; *musically*, Ice Cube's "The Nigga Ya Love to Hate" (to select the first song title Miss Bayles quotes) isn't a patch on "When My Sugar Walks Down the Street," never mind "All the Things You Are." If Ice Cube wasn't rappin' about terminating an unwanted pregnancy by booting his woman in the belly, none of us would be the slightest bit interested. And even then, we're not *that* interested. This is one "authentic black experience" that doesn't travel beyond the ghetto. I offer to Miss Bayles a statistic from the British record industry, admittedly not a body to which she is entirely sympathetic: in 1993, in the United Kingdom, Doris Day outsold all American rap artists combined.

Hunter of forms

Charles Tomlinson
The Door in the Wall.
Oxford, 62 pages, $11.95 paper

reviewed by Robert Richman

Charles Tomlinson's poetic career has been an odd one. Born in England in 1927, Tomlinson belongs to the generation of poets whose sympathies are presumed to lie with the movement known—in an aptly prosaic way—as the Movement. These poets, who emerged in the 1950s and had Philip Larkin as their unofficial leader, spurned the modernism and experimentalism that in their view had ruined poetry, especially in the United States. The Movement poets espoused not just traditional techniques like meter and rhyme but a worldview that its detractors deemed insular and provincial: Little England–ism at its worst. Although Tomlinson was born in the right decade, he was never Movement material. While the formal caliber of his poetry always has been as high as that of his Movement counter-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

parts, his models were more international than national: William Carlos Williams, Charles Oppen, Louis Zukofsky, and, from a later generation, Robert Creeley and the Mexican poet Octavio Paz. So isolated was Tomlinson that for some years he could not pursue a career in England, and pondered leaving. He didn't, and the hostile setting did nothing to stop his writing. *The Door in the Wall* is his thirteenth book of original poems.

As the above names suggest, Tomlinson's affinities lie with the group of poets known as the Objectivists. In the work of these (mostly American) poets, the objects of reality are used not as meaning-bearing symbols or billboards on which to tack human emotions but as occasions to honor the objects' innate physical qualities. In the preface to his 1985 *Collected Poems*, Tomlinson describes the poetry he ultimately chose to write as one where "space represented possibility and where self would have to embrace that possibility somewhat self-forgetfully, putting aside the more possessive and violent claims of personality." The latter include not just the poet's attempt to seize the world and subdue it to his denotative needs, but any effort to make personal concerns (grief, love, remembrance) central to the poem. In Tomlinson's verse, the physical components of reality are recorded with few intrusions by the ego; Tomlinson's world is one where, as he writes in an early poem, fact is "stripped of imagination," and where things seen—in this particular poem, a castle—are "no more symbolic/ Than you or I." (Is Tomlinson condemning Kafka's unreal castle? It is possible.) "To wish a more human image" on a given scene, the poet writes, "[i]s to mistake its purpose." And the harder the object, the better: bridges, aqueducts, and (as in the new book's title poem) walls are everywhere in Tomlinson's work. Stones, too, are ubiquitous. In "The Picture of J. T. in a Prospect of Stone"—a poem based on Andrew Marvell's "Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers"—Tomlinson wishes upon a girl "the constancy of stone," for it "resists/ the slow corrosives/ and the flight/ of time." If in Tomlinson's verse the visible world takes precedence over what is imagined or dreamed—*Seeing Is Believing* is the title of an early book—solid things are preferred to pliant ones, and not just for being able to endure time's passing.

As attuned as Tomlinson is to physical reality, and as much as he likes to defer to it in his poems, it is not accurate to call him simply a nature poet. While most nature poets never make themselves the actual subject of their poems, many do impart something of themselves to the scenes they depict. The last lines of Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"— "And miles to go before I sleep/ And miles to go before I sleep"—mark a turn in the poem from a simple depiction of a visible scene to the depiction of an inner "landscape" where thoughts on mortality rule. Even a nominal infusion of ego like this is taboo to most Objectivists. But for all of Tomlinson's own approval of Objectivism, his poetry differs from typical Objectivist work in three important respects. First, and especially lately, Tomlinson does write about things besides seen objects. Second, the Objectivist-inspired work from his early and middle periods shows more of an active, involved mind, finally, and evinces a better ear and eye, than most of the poets flying under the Objectivist banner. Third, Tomlinson almost never dispenses with punctuation. While much Objectivist poetry strikes one as a form of experimentation, poems written to a theory, Tomlinson's work reveals one theoretically "absent" but still detectable man's irrepressible love of reality.

Tomlinson likes to view the world he cherishes from on high, in airplanes or on mountaintops. In "Above Manhattan," from *Notes from New York* (1984), Tomlinson imagines the view of the "girder-going" construction workers who

> see in print
> the newssheet of the city
> with a single rent where three
> columns, clipped out of it,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

show the Park was planted:
webbed and cradled
by the catenary
distances of bridge on bridge
the place is as real
as something imaginary:
but from where they are
one must read with care:
for to put
one wrong foot
is to drop
more than a glance
and though
this closeness and that distance
make dancing difficult a dance
it is that the mind is led
above Manhattan.

And later in the same book, in "Morwenna's Cliff"—a place, it seems, not in New York—another high view excites the poet:

The glance drops here like a hawk falling,
Grasps, from above, the tide-edge
Gliding in and shaping itself to a profile,
To a certainty of nose, full lips and chin:
The face comes imaging up from chaos
Just where the bedrock forces water
To an instant of definition, lost
Till the next wave meets with white
The same resistance. Hawks hang
And the fine bones bleach where conies
Lurk in their warrened cliff, where only
A man could trace out a human face
Printing and reprinting itself as the waters
mass.

Nowhere in these poems does one find anything like the "confessional" absorption in the self that Tomlinson abhors. Indeed, compared to the poets of the so-called "confessional" school, Tomlinson is rather self-effacing, especially in poems like these from the early and middle part of his career. And yet the self is never completely absent from his poems, if by self we mean that part of the creative ego that transforms reality for its own aesthetic designs. Whether through the act of imagining another's sweeping views ("Above Manhattan"), or through the allowance that "only/ A man could trace out a human face" in the rock ("Morwenna's Cliff"), or even through the decision to again and again pay homage to high perspectives, Tomlinson is present—if not loudly, clamorously so.

Another way Tomlinson lets the slip of his self peek through, as it were, is his habit of commenting on what he sees. "[O]f beginning light," Tomlinson writes in the poem of the same name, "I will say this,/ that it dispenses/ imperial quality to everything/ it touches." And in "Mistlines"—like "Of Beginning Light," from *Written on Water* (1972)—the poet observes: "For the mind is a hunter of forms:/ Finding them wherever it may—in firm/ Things or in frail, in vanishings—/ It binds itself, in a world that must decay."

To hunt for forms certainly involves the mind; to lie in wait for nature's "unregarded congruence"—Tomlinson's words in "History," from *A Peopled Landscape* (1963)—demands the exercise of the faculties and judgment. In these nature poems Tomlinson underscores the value of the mind too much for them to be called purely Objectivist; this poet, at least, isn't determined to render only unmediated perceptions of sensuous reality. In admitting the mind's power in even this slight way, Tomlinson would appear to have a certain affinity with William Wordsworth and Edward Thomas, both of whom honored the physical world and the altering, shaping, endlessly cataloguing mind.

Tomlinson's recent work shows an even greater interest in things other than landscapes and high views. In *The Way In* (1974), the poet's childhood is examined, and examined beautifully. "I thought [Stoke, the poet's birthplace]," Tomlinson writes in "At Stoke,"

Too desolate, diminished and too tame
To be the foundation for anything. It straggles
A haggard valley and lets through
Discouraged greennesses, lights from a pond
or two.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By ash-tips, or where the streets give out
In cindery in-betweens, the hills
Swell up and free of it to where, behind
The whole vapoury, patched battlefield,
The cows stand steaming in an acrid wind.
This place, the first to seize my heart and eye,
Has been their hornbook and their history.

Here, as so often with Tomlinson, what is seen is given priority. But the poet also makes room for personal emotions connected to Stoke, "the first [place]," as he writes, "to seize my heart and eye." In "After a Death," also from *The Way In*, Tomlinson describes a painful visit to a burial place in his region. "Obstinate words," he writes, "measured against the blue,/ . . . cannot conjure with the dead."

Love poetry is also off limits to most rank-and-file Objectivists. But Tomlinson is certainly not opposed to the genre. "The Apparition," from *Written on Water*, is not only a love poem but one in which a dream of love is depicted. To give credence to what isn't seen, of course, is a cardinal Objectivist sin. The poem therefore has not one but two Objectivist strikes against it:

I dreamed, Justine, we chanced on one another
As though it were twenty years ago. Your dark
Too vulnerable beauty shone
As then, translucent with its youth,
Unreal, as dreams so often are,
With too much life. 'Tomorrow',
You said, 'we plough up the pastureland.'
The clear and threatening sky
New England has in autumn—its heightened blue,
The promise of early snow—were proofs enough
Of the necessity, though of what pastureland
You spoke, I'd no idea. Then
Reading the meaning in your face, I found
Your pastureland had been your hallowed ground which now
Must yield to use. And all of my refusals,
All I feared, stood countered
By the resolve I saw in you and heard:
While death itself, its certain thread
Twisted through the skein of consequence
Seemed threatened by the strength
Of those dead years. It was a dream—
No more; and you whom death
And solitude have tried, must know
The treachery of dreams. And yet I do not think it lied,
Because it came, without insistence,
Stood for a moment, spoke and then
Was gone, that apparition,
Beyond the irresolute confines of the night,
Leaving me to weigh its words alone.

Tomlinson is clearly not comfortable with the idea of dreams as the source of emotional truths, but he is hardly against it.

In *Annunciations* (1989), religion is Tomlinson's "new," non-nature theme. "Annunciation," the book's first poem, describes how a "solvent ray" of light, the sun's "messenger," as Tomlinson puts it, "entered the kitchen . . . and lingered there" to—in highly unrealistic fashion—address the poet. "'I shall return,' the appearance promised,/ 'I shall not wait for the last/ day.'" And in "Godchild," meanwhile, the last poem in the book, the once-great denier of spiritual truths (because they can't be verified by the eye) writes: "Given a godchild,/ I must find a god/ worthy of her."

The first poem in *The Door in the Wall*, "The Operation," has as its subject another hunter of form (although Tomlinson doesn't use that phrase to describe him), a man trimming hedges with an electric saw. The book's second poem, "The Clearance," concerns brush being burned in a partially cleared forest. Both poems are classic Tomlinson nature poems in that the depiction of the land is admixed with human activity, in this case, hedge-trimming and brush-burning. The next two poems, however, have titles that suggest subject matter far from landscapes and high views: "Siena in Sixty-eight" and "Paris in Sixty-nine." And indeed both poems do deal with those politically charged cities in those fateful years. In "Siena in Sixty-eight," Tomlinson evokes well the nature of the political commitment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the Spanish revolutionaries. In Siena in 1968, Tomlinson writes,

> History turns to statue, to fancy dress
> And the stylishness of Guevera in his bonnet.
> Here,
> Red-bloused, forgetful sales girls
> For the revolution, flirt with the males
> At a bookstore under an awning of red:
> Lenin, Che, Debray and Mao—
> The unbought titles, pristinely serried.

The flirting girls, Che's stylishness, the unread books all sum up the moral and intellectual insubstantiality of the revolt. (The "awning of red" is a truly splendid detail.) A similar point is made in "Paris in Sixty-nine." Here, Tomlinson relates an encounter he had that year with Octavio Paz. In the embattled city where "the students had their Day," where the Gendarmerie are "[c]lustered at corners" and the theater "lay silent/ But for the sloganned walls," the two poets find themselves, of all things, talking shop. "I trust the thoughts that come to me/ When walking," Tomlinson replies to Paz's confession of liking to walk in the morning. "Do you, too, *work* when walking?" Tomlinson asks his friend. But Paz misunderstands: "Work when I am working . . . ?"

"What matters in the end (it never comes)," Tomlinson writes later in the poem, is the visible world he has always adored, "what is seen along the way," and not the posturing of a transient band of insurgents. Let others march through the squares to vent their steam, Tomlinson seems to be suggesting; he would rather pay tribute to the moment in the Paris dusk when, as he writes, "the lights come on, not one by one,/ But all at once."

What matters too, at least according to "Paris in Sixty-nine," is "shop"—the writing of poems. And so the poet, who in the midst of the blaring traffic and the political maelstrom of 1969 never had his question answered by his Mexican friend, repeats it:

> All the recurrences of that constellation
> Never reunited us by that river.
> Yet, time finding us once more together
> On English soil, has set us talking,
> So let me renew my unrequited question
> From twenty years ago: 'Do you, Octavio,
> Work when you are walking . . . ?'

Despite appearances, then, Tomlinson's poems very much involve an active, forming ego, and even employ the self at times as point and subject. And yet, the issue is moot when confronted with the physical presence of a Tomlinson poem. Like one of the endlessly enchanting landscapes he seeks to render, the typical Tomlinson poem is a blend of immaculate form and impeccable observation. Even though there seems to be much repetition in Tomlinson's poems in terms of subject matter, particularly in the early books, there is never any redundancy of aesthetic effect. This is one of Tomlinson's great achievements.

"A whole book could be written about a single person as he really is. Even that would not exhaust him, and one would never come to the end of him." So writes Elias Canetti in his book of aphorisms, *The Secret Heart of the Clock*. The same could be said of the natural world, to which Charles Tomlinson continues to pay his unique brand of poetic homage.

Life stories

Ian Hamilton
Keepers of the Flame:
Literary Estates and the Rise of
Biography from Shakespeare to Plath.
Faber & Faber, 344 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Thomas Mallon

This highly sensible and entertaining study of literary biography seems to have surprised its own author. Ian Hamilton's prescription for approaching writers' lives slowly and respectfully "may sound fishy," he admits, "coming as it does from the biographer of Robert Lowell (d. 1977) and the near, would-be or failed biographer of J. D. Sal-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inger (1919–), but there it is. We live and learn." Indeed, those who remember the Lowell book as a repetitive, over-documented re-creation of nervous breakdown after nervous breakdown, and who followed Hamilton's later battle over the Salinger letters, will be pleased to see how lean and writer-friendly *Keepers of the Flame* has turned out. Its "dozen or so case-histories" concentrate for the most part on the genre's ethics: "How much should a biographer tell? How much should an executor suppress? And what would the biographee have wanted— do we know?"

A good portion of the book concerns last wills and testaments, whose ambiguity has always guaranteed trouble. Carlyle left behind a tangle of directives that started a war between his biographer and niece: "Froude wanted to write a Carlylean *Carlyle*; Mary wanted straightforward, old-style, mealy-mouthed commemoration." A century later, Philip Larkin, ordinarily a master of plain speaking, waited until he was in the hospital and near death before signing off on a bundle of contradictions. Even when the marching orders are clear, executors have a tendency to think that they know better than the dead and are free to contradict their wishes in fulfillment of some higher responsibility toward literary history.

Along with the wills, there are the widows, often as exasperating as the written instructions, and trouble ever since Mary Palmer, Andrew Marvell's landlady, insisted after his death that she had really been Mary Marvell, his wife. *Keepers of the Flame* is very amusing when it comes to battles between survivors and biographers (Robert Louis Stevenson's widow versus Sidney Colvin; Rupert Brooke's mother against Sir Edward Marsh; Kipling's daughter versus Lord Birkenhead), though Hamilton might have found room for one or two helpful helpmeets in his gallery of termagants.

Hamilton does a particularly good job on the question of literary celebrity, which got its real start with Pope, who contrived a way to publish his own letters while still alive, and was the first writer to complain of his privacy's being invaded, a complaint that was of course "a boast." After his death, his executor, Bishop Warburton, so enjoyed the job that "it seems as if he *became* Pope, even handing out books from the poet's library inscribed 'From Alexander Pope.'" Hamilton traces the progress of Boswell's reputation from being the starstruck idiot described by Macaulay ("Servile and impertinent, shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot . . .") to being the artistic shaper of all the raw booty that remained hidden in Malahide Castle and Fettercairn House more than a century after his death. By the early nineteenth century, authorial celebrity had progressed to the point where Byron's death in Missolonghi, when it came in 1824 (still a generation before "mass-circulation magazines and news sheets had turned authors into breakfast-table stars"), could be seen the way Truman Capote's would one day be described, as a good career move. The "supreme egotist died for a foreign cause" at a time when his "myth was in need of some grand revitalising gesture."

Rather than plumbing further into personal depths and passions, the Romantics, somewhat unpredictably, helped push biography toward its temporary Victorian squeamishness. If inconsistent with their lust for self-expression, the new calls for restraint jibed with the Romantics' "idea of the poet as a type of saint, extraordinary, set apart," against which "a Boswellian pursuit of the whole truth" might prove destructive. Wordsworth, who as a young man had appreciated Boswell, took up the cause of Robert Burns (against biographers who would portray him as a drunken rake) less out of fidelity to the ploughman-poet's memory than as a counterattack upon the pugilism of Francis Jeffrey, from which he had begun to suffer: "there was a connection, [Wordsworth] perceived, between Boswellian biography and the *Edinburgh*'s ad hominem reviewing. The impulse in each was to de-sanctify; for Wordsworth, to de-sanctify was to destroy." (His own fears of a posthumous sex scandal over Annette Vallon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

also motivated him to urge caution upon biographers.)

So Victorian hagiography, a "Reticence in three volumes," according to Gladstone, was an extension of Romantic reverence. Before publishing his own *Life* of Carlyle, Froude edited the author's *Reminiscences* (1881), and found himself attacked for not cutting out more dark matter than he did. Then, as today, however, the revelation of unpleasantness can be mitigated by shrewd scheduling. At Froude's suggestion, Carlyle's memoir was published before his wife Jane's letters: If "the defense [was] heard before the prosecution," the shock would be less. (Last year, American readers were inoculated against Philip Larkin's misanthropic letters by the prior appearance of Andrew Motion's Larkin biography. In Britain, the letters had preceded the biography, and the shock was a bit more rude.) The principal difference between the Victorians' cries for restraint and our own occasional censures of unnecessary disclosure is that the Victorians probably meant theirs, whereas ours are mostly the crocodile tears of a trash-cultural appetite that may experience moments of shame but never gets up from the table.

Things were changing by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and Hamilton does good work debunking the myth that debunking biography sprang full-blown from the hairy head of Lytton Strachey, when he produced *Eminent Victorians* in 1918. In fact, E. F. Benson, by 1895, was complaining that such enterprises as the "English Men of Letters" series were "stripping the mystery off anything that is lovely." Strachey's influence, Hamilton argues, "may have been more peaceable than is usually supposed." He was not one for original research, and "for most keepers of the flame, a cartoon-style irreverence or a fanciful hypothesis is more readily tolerable than a straight-faced perusal of the facts. On the other hand, of course, a plodding sleuth—armed with a Stracheyesque contempt for old habits of decorum and respectfulness: well, he might turn out to be the worst development of all."

With this sentence Hamilton might be said to define the modern academic literary biographer, someone hoping to splash out of his humdrum pond and toward the real shores of literature by collecting all the sordid facts that lie baking in the Texas sun, even if he can't marshall them into anything readable. *Keepers of the Flame*, by contrast, is almost always stylish and good-humored. The preface to Sprat's *Life of Cowley* is, according to Hamilton, distinguished by a "pioneering timidity"; and after all the wildly discrepant physical descriptions of Shelley by his early biographers, Hamilton finds it "small wonder that Shelley's son took up photography." One could do without his frequent use of the term "biographee," venerable coinage though it may be, but on the whole he brings such wit to the genre that one begins to believe it might yet be rescued from those trade-published professors who roam the academic landscape year after year, eating up libraries' special collections like dull-eyed pandas on some grant-funded bamboo binge.

Hamilton's opinions are independent without being perverse, even if they extend to a preference, in human terms, for John Donne the Younger over the crafty Dean of St. Paul's. His easy range of reference is confidence-inspiring. He tells us, for instance, that Carlyle, when he met Froude, "was fifty-four, Johnson's age when he met Boswell." One doesn't write a sentence like that unless one simply *knows* these things. The following passage on the change in Henry James, after his removal from London at fifty-five, does in half a paragraph what it might take some biographers half a volume to accomplish:

> He shaved off his beard, affected sage-like airs and orotundities, welcomed young pre-Bloomsbury devotees and encouraged them to call him Master, cher maître, maestro and the like; he even permitted himself the odd feelingful dalliance with certain of his better-looking male disciples—nothing physical, we understand ("I can't, I can't, I *can't!*" cried

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

James, when young Hugh Walpole offered himself to him), but, expressed in letters, more unguardedly frolicsome than might have been expected—expected, that's to say, even by James.

Keepers of the Flame is full of similarly concise sketches, ones that remind a reader of the real reason modern literary biography, certainly its American variety, is so bad: its prolixity, its preference for accumulation over perspicuousness. It sees nothing steadily and whole, leaving the business of selection and final analysis to the reader, after a truckload of fact has been dumped, chronologized but otherwise unsorted, in front of his eyes. In our own time, life is long and biography even longer.

Hamilton's own conclusions have a moderate, almost Johnsonian, good sense to them. For heirs and executors, he advocates the embargo instead of the bonfire, and for biographers a decent interval over an avid rush; but he makes no pious insistence that writers themselves owe candor to posterity. He has, in fact, no problem with their performing whatever pre-emptive manipulations they like: "writers, indeed, any potential or probable biographees, should follow Henry James and try to serve as their own keepers of the flame." James's failure was "to cover all the angles." He left Leon Edel and the rest of his biographers with far more material than he was able to get rid of. James being James, the posthumous trove has provided "more mysteries than glimpses," but he still told his executor that his "sole wish is to frustrate as utterly as possible the post-mortem exploiter," a determination in keeping with his larger awareness that "the way for a writer to promote himself . . . is by *not having a self* to promote. The point about relics is that there must be very few of them, and even these should be of questionable authenticity." Perhaps the most vivid illustration of the rule is provided by Hamilton's chapter on Rupert Brooke, whose progress from heroic icon to neurotic boor has progressed at roughly the speed with which his literary remains have seen light.

JUVENILIA
Poems, 1922-1928
W. H. Auden

Edited by Katherine Bucknell

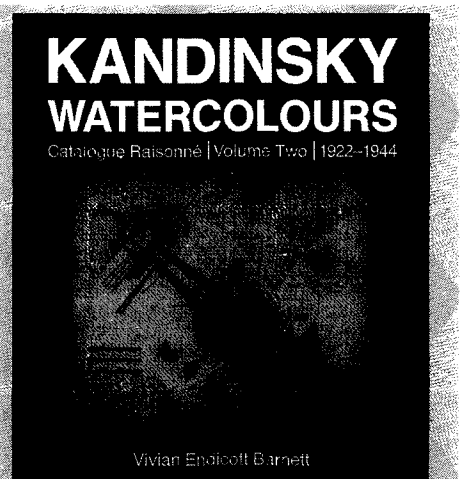
"The evolution of a great poet is abundantly manifest here, in a volume essential not only to lovers of Auden himself, but to all who are intrigued by chrysalid mysteries."
—John Fuller, Magdalen College, Oxford

". . . an indispensable book for the study of modern poetry."
—J. D. McClatchy, Editor, *The Yale Review*

Cloth: $29.95 ISBN 0-691-03415-X
Not available from Princeton in the Commonwealth, except Canada

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
AVAILABLE AT FINE BOOKSTORES
OR DIRECTLY FROM THE PUBLISHER: 609-883-1759

KANDINSKY
WATERCOLOURS
Catalogue Raisonné | Volume Two | 1922–1944



Cataloguing more than eight hundred works from the Bauhaus period (1922–1933) and the artist's last years in Paris (1934–1944), arranged in chronological order, this splendid book also includes eight recently discovered watercolours painted in Russia. *168 color plates, 815 halftones.*
$265.00 cloth
At bookstores, or call 607-277-2211
CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS
Sage House • 512 East State Street • Ithaca NY 14850

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The literary-biography debate, and Hamilton's book, keep coming back to "the old insolubles." The issues are basic and enduring, and the genre itself has not much advanced from its real eighteenth-century beginnings. Johnson "was not the most conscientious of biographers" ("if it rained knowledge I'd hold out my hands, but I would not give myself the trouble to go in search of it"), but he was the form's best theoretician, identifying its appeal and problems with a definiteness that has not required improvement. Latter-day *causes célèbres* guarantee bombast, not breakthroughs. The witchy cauldron of "Plath studies" that Janet Malcolm has stirred to such a boil of publicity is not very different from the century-old fight over Froude's book on Carlyle, which split the subject's readers into two parties—"husband's men and wife's men," according to Augustine Birrell. Hamilton's cheerful, straightforward thoughts are more enlightening than Malcolm's, which seem, as usual, more connected to her own personal history than the matter supposedly at hand.

The only thing lacking in *Keepers of the Flame*, aside from a consideration of biography's modern shapelessness, is a real discussion of the one sea change there *has* been to the waters on which the genre floats—the inability any longer to pretend that we are interested in the life in order to illuminate the work. Most readers of modern literary biography have, if they have read them at all, little interest in the writings of the subject. Plath's poetry may be an exception, but its audience is made up of cadres, not readers. To take Hamilton's other contemporary example, Larkin, one doubts that many who went out to buy Andrew Motion's supposedly surprising biography are reading Larkin's poetry as anything more than illustrative material, blocks of quotation to buttress the biographer's points, and as such even less important than the "original material" out of which directors adapt novels for the screen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notebook

William Arrowsmith: a recollection

by James W. Tuttleton

The recent death of William Ayers Arrowsmith (1924–1992) deprived literary life in America of one of its most brilliant men of letters. He was a teacher, a scholar, a poet and a translator, a classicist, an expert on drama, an educational theorist, and a virtuoso film critic. He was also an authority on modern Italian literature and a rebel against university education (with earned degrees from Princeton and Oxford and some ten others conferred *honoris causa*). Everywhere he went, Bill Arrowsmith won teaching awards; simply to list his scholarships and fellowships (e.g., the Prix de Rome, the Rhodes, Woodrow Wilson, Guggenheim, Rockefeller) would take up this page; and his list of publications is a compendium of essential reading in the literary and cinematic arts. I thought that I had come to know Bill Arrowsmith rather well, but a recent issue of *Arion* devoted substantially to his life and accomplishments has shown me unfamiliar aspects of the man and writer whom I had tracked for nearly thirty years.[1]

"Tracked" may seem an odd word choice, but it is an exact one. I first came across Bill Arrowsmith's writings in the mid-1960s. I had just taken a doctorate in English at Chapel Hill and gone up to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. It was of course a tumultuous time in higher education. The war in Vietnam was raging and campuses were aflame with anti-war sentiment. Students, claiming that they were not being heard, staged sit-ins and teach-ins, and took over classes and denounced university courses as "irrelevant." "Free" or "alternative" universities appeared each week and dissolved at a moment's notice. Each term at Madison I gave my two lecture courses—the smaller a graduate survey in American literature with two hundred students, the larger a sophomore survey of English with five hundred. Looking out each day over the huge auditorium at the sea of barely visible faces, at the ocean of anonymous students almost all of whom I would never get to know, Bill Arrowsmith's essays on the importance of teaching and the failures of higher education were then much in my mind. I decided that he was someone I had to keep track of.

Arrowsmith had attained national celebrity in 1966 with a bombshell essay, "The Shame of the Graduate Schools: A Plea for a New American Scholar," in *Harper's Magazine*. He had followed it up with an address that year to the American Council on Education published as "The Future of Teaching." These, together with other pieces like "Arts and Education" and "Graduate Study

1 *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Spring/Fall 1993; Boston University, 312 pages, $7. This issue includes tributes to Arrowsmith by some two dozen of his colleagues and admirers and also reprints three of his essays: "The Shame of the Graduate Schools," "The Future of Teaching," and "Turbulence in the Humanities."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Emulation," had brilliantly described the malaise that had then settled over the universities. I shall return to them in due course. But for the moment I want to stress that Arrowsmith's account of the high vocation of teaching, understood in the Socratic sense, made me reconsider my situation at Wisconsin. Besides, my colleagues there had erupted into vicious factionalism over control of the department; bitter infighting over the war was disguised as a battle over the curriculum; and student discontent smothered the campus in recurrent clouds of tear gas.

Life and other magazines had begun to pick up Arrowsmith and feature his educational ideas; he was enjoying his fifteen minutes of fame. He was then teaching at the University of Texas, which was awash in money produced by nearby oil discoveries. At this wealthy Southern institution, Harry Ransom had decided to spend the university's oil money by building new office buildings, constructing an unparalleled library of rare books and manuscripts, and buying a faculty equal to that of Yale and Harvard combined. It was commonly rumored that boxcars full of literary manuscripts, of all the important writers in English, were pulling into the Austin siding every day. John Silber, the redoubtable president of Boston University, was then a young philosophy professor and had just been named dean of the college; Arrowsmith was brought into the Classics Department; and many others who afterward went on to great academic recognition—including Roger Shattuck, D. S. Carne-Ross, Christopher Middleton, Frederic Will, and Don Weismann—formed a nucleus of brilliant young critics and scholars at Texas.

I decided that I wanted the intellectual excitement generated by colleagues like Arrowsmith, Silber, and their confreres. Of course there were troubling rumors about Texas: the disorder of the anti-war sentiment there was strong, the English Department was divided, and the state legislators in Austin were ham-handedly intrusive in every sphere of university life. But none of that seemed different from the situation at Wisconsin. It took me a year and a half to prepare myself to be indispensable to Texas. But when at last I was invited to Austin for the final interview, surviving even a severe roughing-up at the hands of the faction-ridden English Department, I discovered that John Silber had just been fired as dean, that Bill Arrowsmith had leveled a long, detailed public broadside against the university administration, and that they and a number of first-rate people were on their way out. "The Sack of Athens in Austin," as the national media called it, deprived me of the chance to meet Bill Arrowsmith, who took off for Boston University with John Silber. Chagrined, I remained in Madison for a year and then came to New York University. Arrowsmith I would continue to have to read at a distance.

Bill Arrowsmith at this time had already become well known for his remarkable translations of Petronius's *Satyricon* (1959) and Aristophanes' plays *The Birds* (1961) and *The Clouds* (1962). But he was also a great organizer of other translators, and he went on to propose and become the general editor of a multi-volume series of new translations of the complete Greek tragedies; and, aside from badgering others into producing new versions, he himself translated Euripides' *Alcestis*, *Cyclops*, *Heracles*, *Orestes*, *Hecuba*, and *The Bacchae* for the University of Chicago Press. With Roger Shattuck he co-edited *The Craft and Context of Translation* (1961) and, years later, brought out Nietzsche's *Unmodern Observations* (1990). He was likewise one of the most brilliant critics of T. S. Eliot in recent memory.

Arrowsmith had always loved Italy, traveled there as often as possible, and had become an expert on modern Italian literature. He translated *Six Modern Italian Novellas* (1964) and Cesare Pavese's *Dialogues with Leucò* (1965) and *Hard Labor* (1976), as well as Montale's *The Storm and Other Things* (1985), *The Occasions* (1987), and *Cuttlefish Bones* (1993). As if Eliot, the classics, educational theory, and modern Italian literature

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were not enough, Arrowsmith had also turned to cinema and begun to teach film and write brilliantly about directors like Kurosawa and Antonioni. Meanwhile, no university could hold him (or perhaps tolerate for long the fireworks that were always bursting in his vicinity). A colleague in Classics, John Herington, said that Arrowsmith's "chief failing, as I saw it, was intemperate rage. Anyone might become its target, but it probably fell most furiously upon persons whom he labeled *philologists*." He would strenuously announce that classicists, on the whole, couldn't conjugate a verb, had no idea of what criticism was about, and put their students to sleep. English departments, he complained, were theory-ridden with self-important incompetents. University administrators were by and large a breed of pusillanimous trimmers. And he always moved on after a few years —Boston University, Princeton, MIT, Yale, Hopkins—and I read him, with admiration, from afar.

Why Arrowsmith moved about had as much to do with his educational theories as his personality. As essays like "The Shame of the Graduate Schools" and "The Future of Teaching" make plain, he had concluded that educational life in America was "timid, unimaginative, debased, inefficient, [and] futile" because the humanists "had betrayed the humanities." Graduate education was especially reprehensible to him because, in following the example of the German universities, graduate schools had grown indifferent to teaching and adopted a doubtful scientism intended merely to inculcate information. Arrowsmith held that a mastery of scientific method "cannot help man live or die well." Only the humanities could do that. Graduate educators had therefore, for him, betrayed the central "enabling principle" of the humanities: "the principle of personal influence and personal example." He called for Socratic teachers who were "visible embodiments of the *realized* humanity of our aspirations, intelligence, skill, scholarship; men ripened or ripening into realization, as Socrates at the close of the *Symposium* comes to be." Finding few such teachers in higher education, he thought it no surprise to see "the secession of the student from the institutions of higher learning on the grounds that they no longer educate and are therefore, in his word, *irrelevant*."

Arrowsmith had taken his B.A. at Princeton, gone on to Oxford for another B.A. and M.A., and then returned to Princeton for the doctorate in Classics. Like many other young men of his time, he had fallen under the spell of Princeton's R. P. Blackmur, a superb teacher with a passionate following. The snide graduate-school professors at Princeton thought little of Blackmur, who lacked formal education and never even finished high school. And students were often warned not to get involved with this "mere critic" in the Creative Writing Department who practiced the formalist reading of texts. But the example of Blackmur defined for Arrowsmith a pedagogical ideal to which he afterward became devoted: "the formal discourse of the amateur" who visibly lives by his convictions. And Blackmur's formalism, so different from the "mere philology" of the dry-as-dust classicists, fixed Arrowsmith's mature critical method, "a free and unindoctrinated habit of mind, provisional and complex according to the nature of its subject, a habit of mind based on knowledge and love. A criticism, in short, adapted to the nature of the work of art."

Arrowsmith's willingness to let his criticism be instructed by the nature of the work of art itself sat well with me, especially as, during the 1970s, mere ideology—most of it either Marxist or deconstructionist—was beginning to dominate academic literary criticism. And when, about 1981, I was offered the opportunity to meet Arrowsmith personally, I leaped at the chance.

Here was the burly man of middling height with a small beard, the man with a boxer's build and the imperious manner of a commanding general. He was a performer by instinct; he sang, acted, and improvised with abandon and loved any hilarious obscenity (after the manner of Aristophanes).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His infectious laugh made any swapped dirty story a thigh-slapper, and his gift for puns (e.g., Eros-myth for his own name) was as irrepressible as it was doubtful. He loved good wines and had an appetite for great cuisine. And in every respect he lived life fully, with gusto and apparent abandon.

I recall in particular one meeting with him that occurred at the posh upper–Fifth Avenue apartment of his long-time companion, Marianne Meyer. It included Hilton Kramer and a few others, and much of the conversation was devoted to Kramer's plan to organize a new journal of aesthetic and cultural criticism to be called *The New Criterion*. Arrowsmith had always understood the decisive influence of critical quarterlies on the intellectual and artistic expression of the age. He himself was a founding editor of *The Chimera* in the early 1940s; and, with Frederick Morgan and Joe Bennet, he had helped to launch *The Hudson Review* in 1948. In the early 1960s he had helped to found *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* and was also a contributing editor to *Delos*, *Mosaic*, *Tulane Drama Review*, *American Poetry Review*, and *Pequod*. In any case, we all discussed Hilton Kramer's plan, endorsed it enthusiastically, and with the first issue in September of 1982, *The New Criterion* was formally launched.

By the time I met Arrowsmith, I had become Chairman of the English Department at New York University and a serious reader of Eliot's poetry. I had heard that he was writing a book to be called *To Disturb Externals: The Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, and naturally I wanted to read anything on the Old Possum that Arrowsmith might produce. My files tell how generous he was with offprints of his work, some of them amended in his own hand even after publication, some of them photocopied on weird papers like pink onionskin. I wanted to read Arrowsmith on Eliot, but mostly, though, I wanted him hired at NYU; and, though I had not been able to hook up with him at Texas, the opportunity for him to join me at NYU came in 1982. The details of his appointment have perhaps an interest of their own.

In 1978 a Trustee of the university was persuaded to donate a professorship in the humanities. We chairmen looked forward to the new appointment of a distinguished humanist, but were disappointed when the chair was promptly appropriated by the president of the university, John Sawhill, who had no significant credentials in the humanities and was, of all things, an economist. The Trustee was apparently not too happy with this development either; and when John Brademas replaced Sawhill in the presidency, it was bruited about that the Trustee had now renewed his demand that the chair go to his protégé, an anthropologist who specialized in the cultural importance of textiles and weaving. I and a number of other chairmen protested so loudly —at yet another diversion of this chair to the social sciences—that we were challenged to recruit someone better. Who better for a university professorship in the humanities than Bill Arrowsmith—classicist, cinema critic, translator of modern Italian literature, and by now an expert on American Indian oratory to boot? Various people warned me that Arrowsmith sowed dissension wherever he went, was a constant troublemaker, would be a chairman's nightmare, etc. But none of this proved true. When I approached Bill, prefacing the offer of appointment with the story of my wish to join him in Texas, he was charmed. No manifest ignorance or administrative clumsiness on my part ever ruffled him: I had recognized his genius from the outset and all was forgivable. The Trustee, for his part, was apparently charmed with Arrowsmith as well, for he had to concede that Bill was the inevitable candidate for his humanities professorship.

From 1982 through 1984, Bill spent one term each year at NYU. Of course English had to share him with other departments, which seemed only fair since I had presented him (rightly) as an interdisciplinary polymath. Our students got a dazzling doctoral seminar in T. S. Eliot. But he also taught "Theories of Literary Genres (The Dialogue)" for Comparative Literature, "Greek

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Drama: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides" for the Classics Department, and a film course called "Antonioni's Cinematic Poetry" in the School of the Arts. I see that in the spring of 1982 he wrote to me that "the Eliot essay is now in final form, and I'm hoping to get it xeroxed and sent out in a week or so. Just where it will be published, I don't know. *The Southern Review* might want still a third T.S.E. piece, but I've also had interest expressed by Hilton Kramer for his new journal, to be called *The New Criterion*, and presumably therefore in need of some Eliotic homage. *Vediamo*. When the xeroxes are ready, I'll send you a copy *senz' altro*." And indeed Arrowsmith's "Eros in Terre Haute: T. S. Eliot's 'Lune de Miel,'" a brilliant account of an early poem written in French, did appear in the second issue of the magazine.[2]

By 1984 I had stepped down from the chairmanship and, for reasons then beyond my ken, Arrowsmith decided to withdraw from NYU and devote himself entirely to Emory University, which, with its Coca-Cola millions, had lured him down to Atlanta to the Woodruff Professorship. I find in the file a letter to my successor dated January 16, 1985, suggesting that Arrowsmith thought NYU did not know what to do with such a professorship as he had been given (true) and expressing regret that the members of the Classics Department were only marginally hospitable (the chair, Latinist Larissa Bonfante, excepted). Classics, it turned out, would not let him teach anything but mythology and drama in translation; and that, as he observed, could hardly appeal to a classicist. It accounted, substantially, for why he could not stay on. But he was not a member of that department, and the number of graduate students who could handle advanced Greek was (scandalously) too small to give up to another—even though Bill was one of the great teachers and Greek translators of the age. Bill's experience with the Classics Department had probably been acted out before, at other universities. He had already offended nearly all the classicists in the United States by writing, in "The Shame of the Graduate Schools," that Classics was a "backward discipline," that "an alarmingly high proportion of what is published in classics—and in other fields—is simply rubbish or trivia," and that he preferred teaching undergraduates, who were, he said, "more serious" about the relation of learning to life.

Those at least were his views in the 1960s. I am not sure that he held to them in quite the same way into the 1980s. But, in conclusion, let me suggest that the Sixties shaped Bill Arrowsmith in more ways than one. While his attack on higher education never mentioned the war in Vietnam, certain aspects of his thinking, a quarter century later, seem distinctly of that time and place. As a classicist he did not accord preeminence to the Greek Apollonian vision of reason or to the *lumen siccum*, the dry light of clarity and lucidity, of Latin rationalism. The idea of reason controlling the self, the body, and the passions was to him quite arid and implied merely the *techné* of science. Nietzsche the classicist and the genealogist of tragic drama was one of his masters, and from Nietzsche and the Greek tragedians he derived the very distinctive worldview outlined in his essay "Turbulence in the Humanities." There he proposed that

2 Paradoxically, Arrowsmith took umbrage at the first issue of the magazine. He condemned the editor's introductory "Note," called Kramer's description of the aesthetic purpose of the journal a defense of capitalism, and sought to withdraw the Eliot article, but it was too late, as the piece had already been set in type. Some of us thought this aversion to capitalism rather odd, given Arrowsmith's expensive tastes, but were prepared to understand intellectual consistency as the hobgoblin of little minds. Arrowsmith's only other appearance in *The New Criterion* was a spirited exchange of letters in June of 1987 with William Jay Smith, who had had the temerity to challenge Arrowsmith's translation of Montale and who even called him, of all things, a pedant. Why Arrowsmith might have disagreed with the founding idea of *The New Criterion* is a matter to which I shall return in a moment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> the humanities are largely Dionysiac or Titanic; they cannot be wholly grasped by the intellect; they must be suffered, felt, seen. This inexpressible turmoil of our animal emotional life is an experience of *other* chaos matched by our own chaos. We see the form and order not as pure and abstract but as something emerged from chaos, something which has suffered into being. The humanities are always caught up in the actual chaos of living, and they also emerge from that chaos. If they touch us at all, they touch us totally, for they speak to what we are too.

He insisted on turbulence as the condition of great literature, not Apollonian reason; the agitation and disorder of experience, not the *ex post facto* intelligibilities produced by the mind. "It is my conviction that the criticism of Greek tragedy, too heavily committed to the criteria of orderly reason and the rhetoric of intelligence, has dehumanized its characters by cutting them off from the condition in relation to which they win their meaning," he wrote. "The hero, cut off by an inadequate criticism from the actual anguish of his condition, loses his reality and therefore his meaning." He found his metaphor for the human condition in Sophocles' character Philoctetes—the "Sophoclean man, torn and tormented by his double nature, half god and half brute, the aspiring animal." He saw moral and social values as originating in the Titanic struggle of man to become his fate and to transcend his animality. Heracles in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* was a like exemplum. Afflicted by the love potion mixed of the Centaur's gore, Heracles

> *chooses* to die by his own hand rather than be mastered by the beast within. He will die by his own blaze, the inward god triumphant over the beast. He will burn the beast out of himself, even though it is the beast that has made him the hero he is. For it is Titanic, animal, energy—pure *hybris*—that makes great men do great things and achieve god. All order worth having, Sophocles says, is born of the effort of turbulent men—men who do not know themselves—to surpass the animal turbulence that drives them to violate their limits and break down the barriers between man and god.

Arrowsmith wanted teachers of the humanities to be equals of the heroes or great men of Classical epic and drama, men of *areté*, worthy of emulation; or, failing that, men who at least knew what greatness was and desired it for themselves and their students. Bill always denied that he was "a latter-day priest of Dionysus," disowned the Sixties "'apocalyptic' faction against the exponents of order and reason," and affirmed controlled passion. But the merit Arrowsmith ascribed to Titanic animal energy in conflict with the world and the role he assigned it in the origination or transvaluation of values, while reason or the Apollonian vision was relegated to a secondary position, made it plain to me that there was much of the Nietzschean romantic in Bill's intellectual makeup. It was this readiness to allow Titanic animal energy its explosive moment in the streets that doubtless made him resistant to the appeal of *The New Criterion*, which meant—as I understood it—to bring under the scrutiny of reason all modes of cultural expression demanding immediate alterations. Still, what was fascinating for me was to see—once I had met him—how richly Arrowsmith embodied in himself the passionate intellectual intensity and headlong appetite for life of the heroes of Classical antiquity whom he so much admired for challenging the limits of fate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Index

The New Criterion

Volume 12 *September 1993–June 1994*

Allen, Brooke G.B.S.: the life of George Bernard Shaw, *on Michael Holroyd's biography*, Sept., 38;
More than sensational: the life & art of Wilkie Collins, Dec., 31;
A talent to delight: Nancy Mitford in her letters, *a review of* Love from Nancy: The Letters of Nancy Mitford *edited by Charlotte Mosley* (BOOKS), Jan., 58;
Poisoned Wells, *a review of* The Invisible Man: The Life & Liberties of H. G. Wells *by Michael Coren* (BOOKS), Feb., 71;
If the suit fits . . ., *a review of* A Frolic of His Own *by William Gaddis* (BOOKS), Mar., 60;
The professor & the poetess, *a review of* The Russian Girl, *by Kingsley Amis* (BOOKS), May, 69;
Cheever Country, 1994, *on new novels by Benjamin Cheever, Nicholson Baker, Douglas Hobbie & Rick Moody* (FICTION CHRONICLE), June, 58
Arkin, Marc M. Joyful Noyes, *a review of* Without Sin: The Life & Death of the Oneida Community *by Spencer Klaw* (BOOKS), Dec., 73;
Does God have a future?, *a review of* A History of God *by Karen Armstrong* (BOOKS), Jan., 73;
Big little lady, *a review of* Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life *by Joan D. Hedrick* (BOOKS), Mar., 72;
"The Tenth Justice," *a review of* Learned Hand *by Gerald Gunther* (BOOKS), May, 75
Ascher, Maria Louise The first "Immortelle," *a review of* Marguerite Yourcenar: Inventing a Life *by Josyane Savigneau* (BOOKS), Oct., 62
Auden, W. H. Four early poems (Encounter, Quique amavit, Aware & Bach & the lady), June, 32

Bloom, Jeffrey Shorter notice *of* Life After God *by Douglas Coupland* (BOOKS), Apr., 79
Bowman, James The use & abuse of violence, *on television violence* (THE MEDIA), Sept., 71;
The air is blue, *on television sex* (THE MEDIA), Oct., 54;
Care TV, *on "compassion" & "caring" on television* (THE MEDIA), Nov., 63;
Leave it to Beavis, *on television programming for children & other matters* (THE MEDIA), Dec., 56;
Feeling sentimental, *on the* New York Times *columnist Anna Quindlen & other matters* (THE MEDIA), Jan., 53;
Fornigate follies, *on David Brock's report on the sex life of Bill Clinton in* The American Spectator *& media reaction to it* (THE MEDIA), Feb., 61;
Winter games, *on media coverage of the Tonya Harding case & other matters* (THE MEDIA), Mar., 47;
Swagger & attitude, *on the importance of being "bad"* (THE MEDIA), Apr., 55;
Hand-wringing over Whitewater, *on the press's self-criticism over its coverage of the White House scandal* (THE MEDIA), May, 63;
Nixon & "Middlemarch": new versions for the 90s, *on the death of Richard Nixon & a teleplay based on the George Eliot novel* (THE MEDIA), June, 52
Brookhiser, Richard State of the essay?, *a review of* United States *by Gore Vidal* (BOOKS), Sept., 80
Brown, Clarence Mann & boy, *a review of* Tintin in the New World *by Frederic Tuten* (BOOKS), Nov., 78
Busch, Trent School zone (Poem), Apr., 31

Carduff, Christopher "Just let me put this bastard on the skids," *a review of* Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life *by Andrew Motion* (BOOKS), Sept., 83;
Shorter notice *of* Brazil *by John Updike* (BOOKS), Feb., 77;
The boys & their baby, *a review of* We Are All in the Dumps with Jack & Guy *by Maurice Sendak* (BOOKS), Mar., 63
Cook, Jonathan Shorter notice *of* Herman Melville: Correspondence *edited by Lynn Horth* (BOOKS), Dec., 78
Cowling, Maurice Alasdair MacIntyre, religion & the university, Feb., 32

Davenport, Guy Tough buttons, *a review of* A Stein Reader *by Gertrude Stein* (BOOKS), Nov., 72;
The sage of Slabsides, *a review of* The World of John Burroughs *by Edward Kanze* (BOOKS), Dec., 68

The Editors Reply to Marjorie Heins (Letter), Nov., 96
Epstein, Daniel Mark The boy in the well (Poem), Mar., 31;
The twins (Poem), Mar., 33;
The ferryman (Poem), May, 40;
Lost owl (Poem), May, 42
Epstein, Joseph C. P. Cavafy, a poet in history, Jan., 15;
Life sentences: the art of Joseph Conrad, June, 16

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Falcoff, Mark Shorter notice *of* The Man Who Wasn't Maigret: A Portrait of Georges Simenon *by Patrick Marnham* (Books), Jan., 78
Frum, David The genius of capitalism, *a review of* John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Savior *by Robert Skidelsky* (Books), Apr., 61

Gibson, Eric Exhibition note *on* Jean Dubuffet, 1943–1963 *at the Hirshhorn Museum* (Art), Sept., 65;
Exhibition note *on* John James Audubon: The Watercolors for "The Birds of America" *at the National Gallery of Art* (Art), Nov., 59;
Exhibition note *on* Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series *at the Phillips Collection* (Art), Dec., 51;
Lives of the artists, *a review of* Elaine & Bill *by Lee Hall &* Mark Rothko *by James E. B. Breslin* (Books), Jan., 69;
Exhibition note *on* Howard Hodgkin: Recent Paintings *at Knoedler & Co.* (Art), Mar., 41;
Exhibition note *on* Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem *at the Guggenheim Museum* (Art), Apr., 42;
Exhibition note *on* Richard Avedon: Evidence, 1944–1994 *at the Whitney Museum of American Art* (Art), May, 53;
Exhibition note *on* American Impressionism & Realism *at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Art), June, 42
Gilbert, Creighton Art the Quattrocento fashioned, *on the vogue for Piero della Francesca & other matters*, Nov., 41
Gioia, Dana Seneca & European tragedy, Dec., 16;
Seneca & the idea of lyric tragedy, Jan., 29.
See also *Seneca*
Glover, Michael Shorter notice *of* The Wreck of the Deutschland *by Sean Street* (Books), Dec., 76;
Through a keyhole, *a review of* Imagination of the Heart: The Life of Walter de la Mare *by Theresa Whistler* (Books), Feb., 73;
Thistles & thorns, *a review of* Selected Poetry *by Hugh MacDiarmid* (Books), Mar., 67;
Doleful laureate, *a review of* Tennyson *by Peter Levi &* Tennyson *by Michael Thorn* (Books), Apr., 74
Gross, John A prodigy of parody, *a review of* A Christmas Garland *by Max Beerbohm* (Books), Jan., 62
Guerin, Christopher D. Who's killing our orchestras? (Letter), Nov., 95

Hadas, Rachel May (Poem), Apr., 34
Hagan, Patti Slip slidin' away, *a review of* Cycles of Rock & Water *by Kenneth A. Brown* (Books), Apr., 72
Haines, John The telling (Poem), Feb., 43;
Wounded life (Poem), May, 43;
Orpheus (Poem), May, 44
Halac, Dennis Ever so true: Willa Cather & T. G. Masaryk, Nov., 36
Hall, Donald Storefront (Poem), Oct., 35;
Lost (Poem), Oct., 36;
Regret (Poem), Oct., 36;
Goodnight (Poem), Oct., 37;
Borders (Poem), Oct., 38;
Order (Poem), Oct., 38
Heins, Marjorie Is art free expression? (Letter), Nov., 96;
The ACLU & the *Finley* case (Letter), Dec., 80

Herington, John Apologies for the ancients, *a review of two studies in the classics by Bernard Knox* (Books), Oct., 58

Johnston, George Sim Relics, *a review of* The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints *by Jacobus de Voragine* (Books), Dec., 62

Kaplan, H. J. The apostle of inversion, *a review of* Genet *by Edmund White* (Books), Nov., 68
Kimball, Roger James Q. Wilson on the moral sense, *on Mr. Wilson's book* The Moral Sense, Sept., 8;
Sex in the twilight zone: Catharine MacKinnon's crusade, *on Ms. MacKinnon's book* Only Words, Oct., 11;
On the one hand, on the other: Stephen Carter tackles religion, *on Mr. Carter's book* The Culture of Disbelief, Dec., 10;
Going no place with Peter Blake, *on Mr. Blake's book* No Place Like Utopia, Jan., 9;
"The Two Cultures" today, *on the C. P. Snow–F. R. Leavis controversy*, Feb., 10;
Exhibition note *on* The Golden Age of Danish Painting *at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Art), Mar., 42;
Without rancor: Sybille Bedford's achievement, Apr., 11;
Exhibition note *on* William Bailey: Selected Works *at the André Emmerich Gallery* (Art), Apr., 41;
When reason sleeps: the academy vs. science, *on* Higher Superstition *by Paul R. Gross & Norman Levitt*, May, 10;
Exhibition note *on* Petrus Christus: Renaissance Master of Bruges *at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Art), May, 55;
Saving the appearances: Roger Scruton on philosophy, *on Mr. Scruton's book* Modern Philosophy: An Introduction & Survey, June, 10
Introduction to "Four Early Poems" by W. H. Auden (Poems), June, 32;
Exhibition note *on* Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts *at the Pierpont Morgan Library* (Art), June, 44
Klinghoffer, David Wunderkind, *a review of* Body & Soul *by Frank Conroy* (Books), Oct., 69
Koch, Stephen Lying for the truth: Münzenberg & the Comintern, Nov., 16;
Reply to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (Letter), Feb., 79
Kramer, Hilton Art & its institutions: notes on the culture war, *on the M.I.T. symposium* The Public Patron: Drafting a Mandate for a Federal Arts Agency *& related matters*, Sept., 4;
Exhibition note *on* Fairfield Porter: An American Painter *at the Parrish Art Museum* (Art), Sept., 64;
Diana Trilling's "Journey," *on Mrs. Trilling's memoir* The Beginning of the Journey, Oct., 6;
Reflections on Miró, *on the Miró retrospective at MOMA*, Nov., 4;
The travels of Henry James, *on James's* Collected Travel Writings, Dec., 6;
Exhibition note *on* American Painting in the 20th Century *at the Royal Academy of Arts, London* (Art), Dec., 51;
"The Intellectuals & the Masses," *on the book by John Carey*, Jan., 4;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Old "Times" & new, *on two* New York Times *memoirs,* My "Times" *by John Corry* & Behind the "Times" *by Edwin Diamond*, Feb., 4;
At the Bauhaus: the fate of art in "the Cathedral of Socialism," Mar., 4;
Who was Dwight Macdonald?, Apr., 5;
Exhibition note *on* Andrew Forge: Recent Paintings *at the Robert Morrison Gallery* (ART), Apr., 43;
Angry history: Richard Pipes on the Bolshevik Revolution, *on Mr. Pipes's book* Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime, May, 5;
Exhibition note *on* Joseph Stella *at the Whitney Museum of American Art* (ART), May, 56;
Willem de Kooning at 90, *on* Willem de Kooning: Paintings *at the National Gallery of Art*, June, 4

Levine, Philip Henri Coulette (Letter), Dec., 80
Lewis, Tess Shorter notice *of* Strolls with Pushkin *by Andrei Sinyavsky* (*Abram Tertz*) (BOOKS), Apr., 78
Lipman, Samuel Who's killing our symphony orchestras?, *on the American Symphony Orchestra League report* Americanizing the American Orchestra, Sept., 13;
New worlds & old, *on three CDs of contemporary music from New World Records* & *a reissue of performances by tenor Jan Kiepura* (MUSIC), Oct., 39;
Reply to Christopher D. Guerin (Letter), Nov., 95;
Lincoln Center's chamber-music problems, *on the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center at 25* (MUSIC), Jan., 43;
On hearing Liszt live, *on a piano recital by Christina Kiss at Carnegie Hall* (MUSIC), Feb., 46
Logan, William The fallen world of Geoffrey Hill, *on Mr. Hill's* New & Collected Poems, Mar., 10
Lyons, Donald Summer fare, *on Jane Bowles's* In the Summer House & *other plays* (THEATER), Sept., 67;
At long last, Lulu, *on Frank Wedekind's* Lulu *plays* (THEATER), Oct., 50;
Young & at sea, *on the Willow Cabin production of Eugene O'Neill's* S.S. Glencairn (THEATER), Nov., 60;
Going nowhere, *on Brian Friel's play* Wonderful Tennessee (THEATER), Dec., 53;
Abes & angels, *on the revival of Robert E. Sherwood's* Abe Lincoln in Illinois, *Tony Kusher's* Angels in America, Part II: Perestroika & *other plays* (THEATER), Jan., 48;
Words at play, *on* All in the Timing, *six one-act comedies by David Ives* (THEATER), Feb., 58;
On belly & floor in Pinterland, *on the Broadway revival of Pinter's* No Man's Land (THEATER), Mar., 44;
Can't anyone here play this game?, *on* Damn Yankees & *other failed Broadway revivals* (THEATER), Apr., 52;
Second chances, *on revivals of Rodgers & Hammerstein's* Carousel & *Odets's* The Flowering Peach (THEATER), May, 58;
Angry women & furious machines, *on recent British imports, a revival of* Picnic & *new plays by Arthur Miller & Edward Albee* (THEATER), June, 45

Mac Donald, Heather Women beware women, *a review of* Who Stole Feminism? *by Christina Hoff Sommers* (BOOKS), June, 66
McDonald, Walter Before children (Poem), Apr., 33
Mack, Sara Ovid transformed, *a review of* The Metamorphoses of Ovid: A New Verse Translation *by Allen Mandelbaum* (BOOKS), Feb., 66
McPherson, Sandra Path through the rhododendron and azalea test gardens twenty years ago (Poem), Nov., 48
Mallon, Thomas Life stories, *a review of* Keepers of the Flame *by Ian Hamilton* (BOOKS), June, 80
Manhire, Bill Some screens (Poem), Nov., 50
Mansfield, Harvey C., Jr. Returning to the Founders: the debate on the Constitution, Sept., 48
Mellow, James R. Agee & after, *a review of* Always Straight Ahead: A Memoir *by Alma Neuman* (BOOKS), Oct., 66
Meyers, Jeffrey Priapic polymath, *a review of* The Sixties *by Edmund Wilson* (BOOKS), Sept., 88;
Smug syndicate, *a review of* Splendours & Miseries: A Life of Sacheverell Sitwell *by Sarah Bradford* (BOOKS), Dec., 70
Morgan, Frederick The fugitive (Poem), Sept., 55;
Gifts (Poem), Sept., 57;
The watcher (Poem), Sept., 58
Morrone, Francis Citizen Jane Jacobs, May, 24
Murray-Brown, Jeremy Festival of smoke, *a review of* A Memoir *by Leni Riefenstahl* (BOOKS), Nov., 74;
Shorter notice *of* The Cinema of Eisenstein *by David Bordwell* (BOOKS), Jan., 79;
Wordless secrets: the cinema of Ingmar Bergman, *on Bergman's book* Images: My Life in Film, Apr., 19

NOTES & COMMENTS
Why waste time on kooks?, *on Deborah Lipstadt's book* Denying the Holocaust, Sept., 1;
Perfect justice, *on the appointment of Dennis Barrie to the directorship of the Rock-&-Roll Hall of Fame*, Sept., 3;
Never apologize, never explain: "The New York Review" at 30, Oct., 1;
Ethical obligations?, *on the* Harper's *magazine forum* New Rules About Sex on Campus, Oct., 3;
Viewing the libretto, *on the Metropolitan Opera's decision to surrender to supertitles*, Oct., 4;
The specialist & the amateur, *on George Levine's review, in* The New York Times Book Review, *of Joseph Epstein's* Pertinent Players, Nov., 1;
Speech or action?, *on speech codes on campus*, Nov., 3;
Alger Hiss, trusted accomplice, *on further evidence that Alger Hiss was a member of the Soviet underground*, Nov., 3;
Redefining deviancy, *on Daniel Patrick Moynihan's essay* Defining Deviancy Down & *Charles Krauthammer's essay* Defining Deviancy Up, Dec., 1;
Not since "Mein Kampf" . . . *on the British reviews of Margaret Thatcher's memoir,* The Downing Street Years, Dec., 3;
Cookies are the least of it, *on Roberta Smith's review, in* The New York Times, *of Mike Kelley at the Whitney Museum*, Dec., 4;
"Word work" in Stockholm, *on Toni Morrison's Nobel Address*, Jan., 1;
Alice Tully, 1902–1993, Jan., 3;
The death of a classical station, *on the decline & demise of New York City's WNCN-FM*, Feb., 1;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Only words, *on the Catharine MacKinnon–Carlin Romano spat in the pages of* The Nation, Feb., 2;
A prescription for fatuousness, *on the Richard Sennett–Richard Rorty exchange on patriotism & the academic Left in* The New York Times, Mar., 1;
Beverly Sills at Lincoln Center, *on the naming of Miss Sills as the Center's chairman of the board*, Mar., 2;
The fringe as mainstream, *on academic book publishing*, Mar., 3;
Exit comparative literature, enter "cultural productions," *on the American Comparative Literature Association's State of the Discipline report*, Apr., 1;
Philosophy made him do it, *on George Steiner's review of the memoirs of Louis Althusser in* The New Yorker, Apr., 2;
"Zeitgeist of the week," *on the phrase coined by Kurt Andersen, the new editor of* New York *magazine*, Apr., 3;
"Viewer discretion is advised," *on the performance art of Ron Athey at the Walker Art Center*, May, 1;
Trilling vs. Trilling, *on the awarding of the Lionel Trilling Book Award to Diana Trilling's* The Beginning of the Journey, May, 2;
Helen Wolff, 1906–1994, May, 3;
Clement Greenberg, 1909–1994, June, 1;
Farewell, Amadeus, *on Lincoln Center's plans to discontinue its Mostly Mozart Festival*, June, 2

Pack, Robert Observer (Poem), Mar., 34
Padhi, Bibhu Small wants, again (Poem), Nov., 51
Penrose, James F. Two types of austerity, *a review of* Sibelius *by Robert Layton &* Stravinsky *by Paul Griffiths* (Books), Nov., 81
Perl, Jed Mostly Marden, *on Brice Marden, William Plevin-Foust & Mark di Suvero* (Art), Sept., 60;
Balthus presents Balthus, *on the Balthus retrospective in Lausanne*, Oct., 17;
Miracle at the Met, *on the new 19th-century European paintings & sculpture galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Art), Nov., 53;
Code name: painting, *on the state of easel painting in New York City: Leland Bell, Trevor Winkfield & others* (Art), Dec., 46;
Snyder's earth, Freud's skin, *on* Joan Snyder: Works with Paper *at the Allentown Art Museum &* Lucian Freud: Recent Works *at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Art), Feb., 51;
Unforgotten years, *on a variety of historical gallery shows in New York City* (Art), Mar., 36;
Matthiasdottir in full color, *on new still lifes & self-portraits by Louisa Matthiasdottir at Salander-O'Reilly* (Art), May, 49;
After Judd: notes at season's end, *on David Salle, Philip Taaffe, Bill Jensen & Donald Judd* (Art), June, 38

Richman, Robert The book of winter, *a review of* The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer: Collected Poems *by John Haines* (Books), Dec., 65;
Shorter notice *of* The Ern Malley Affair *by Michael Heyward* (Books), Feb., 77;
Hunter of forms, *a review of* The Door in the Wall *by Charles Tomlinson* (Books), June, 76
Rudich, Vasily A moralist restored, *a review of* Tacitus *by Ronald Mellor* (Books), Mar., 56
Rutenberg, Alan The imaginative invalid, *a review of* Dreams of Exile: Robert Louis Stevenson *by Ian Bell* (Books), Nov., 84;
Shorter notice *of* The Green Knight *by Iris Murdoch* (Books), Jan., 77

Salter, Mary Jo A dissertation (Poem), Dec., 44
Sartarelli, Stephen An amateur's love of the English: Lampedusa's "Letteratura inglese," Sept., 21;
Mistral (Poem), Apr., 35;
The barbarian within, *on the French government's attempts to stamp out "Franglais"* (Letter from Paris), May, 45.
See also *Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa*
Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr. Gardner Jackson (Letter), Feb., 79
Seneca Lycus proposes marriage, *a scene from* Hercules Furens *adapted from the Latin by Dana Gioia*, Jan., 39
Shapiro, Harvey On writing (Poem), Sept., 59
Shils, Edward The career of Harold Laski, Apr., 24
Simon, John Robed in images: the memoirs of James Merrill, *a review of Mr. Merrill's* A Different Person (Books), Sept., 75;
Shorter notice *of* Alice in Bed *by Susan Sontag* (Books), Oct., 71;
Text's jest-book, *a review of* Beckett's Dying Words *by Christopher Ricks* (Books), Jan., 65;
Richard Wilbur: a tribute (Notebook), Mar., 77;
Anna Akhmatova, May, 29
Simpson, Louis The choir master's evening party (Poem), Dec., 41
Sisson, C. H. In the silence (Poem), Nov., 46
Spires, Elizabeth One life, one art: Elizabeth Bishop in her letters, May, 18
Steyn, Mark She likes a Gershwin tune, *a review of* Hole in Our Soul *by Martha Bayles* (Books), June, 73
Straus, Roger W. Wilson's "The Sixties" (Letter), Nov., 96

Tanenhaus, Sam Real powers, *a review of* It All Adds Up *by Saul Bellow* (Books), Apr., 65
Teachout, Terry Another sun person heard from, *on* Black Studies, Rap & the Academy *by Houston A. Baker, Jr.* (Notebook), Sept., 91;
The abyss stares back, *a review of* Looking into the Abyss *by Gertrude Himmelfarb* (Books), June, 70
Teichman, Jenny What is sacred? Ronald Dworkin & his answers, *on Mr. Dworkin's book* Life's Dominion, Nov., 8;
Understanding Arendt, *a review of* Essays in Understanding *by Hannah Arendt* (Books), Apr., 68
Tomasi di Lampedusa, Giuseppe Reflections on English literature *selected & translated from the Italian by Stephen Sartarelli*, Sept., 27;
Further reflections on English literature *selected & translated from the Italian by Stephen Sartarelli*, Oct., 23
Tomlinson, Charles Four for David Smith (Interior for exterior, The timeless clock, Hudson River landscape & Bolton Landing) (Poems), Dec., 42
Tucker, William Rodin in the round, *a review of* Rodin *by Ruth Butler* (Books), Mar., 52
Tuttleton, James W. Wharton redux?, *on the Edith Wharton revival* (Notebook), Nov., 89;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The many lives of Frederick Douglass, Feb., 16;
William Arrowsmith: a recollection (NOTEBOOK), June, 85

Weiner, Lauren Shorter notice *of* Ottoline Morrell *by Miranda Seymour* (BOOKS), Oct., 73
Weissmann, Gerald Mesmer revisited: Bill Moyers & New Age healing, *on Mr. Moyers's book & television series* Healing & the Mind (NOTEBOOK), Oct., 74
Wilkin, Karen Rebecca Horn at the Guggenheim (ART), Oct., 44;
Exhibition note *on* Baudelaire's Voyages: The Poet & His Painters *at the Hecksher Museum* (ART), Nov., 57;
Maple-leaf modernist: the case of Emily Carr, Dec., 26;
The eloquent whispers of Giorgio Morandi, *on the new Museo Morandi in Bologna*, Jan., 23;
An endless now: the art of Euan Uglow, Feb., 27;
Degas & his landscapes, *on* Degas Landscapes *at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Mar., 18;
Rubens & his age, *on* The Age of Rubens *at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (ART), Apr., 36;
The best & the worst of Louise Bourgeois, *on* Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory *at the Brooklyn Museum*, June, 26
Winegarten, Renee Seductive monsters: Laclos's "Liaisons dangereuses," Mar., 24;
Flaubert's muse, *a review of* Rage & Fire: A Life of Louise Colet *by Francine du Plessix Gray* (BOOKS), May, 72
Woldenberg, Susan Frank Lloyd Wright comes to MOMA, *on the exhibition* Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect (ARCHITECTURE), Apr., 45

Books considered

Amis, Kingsley The Russian Girl (*Brooke Allen*), May, 69
Arendt, Hannah Essays in Understanding 1930–1954, *edited by Jerome Kohn* (*Jenny Teichman*), Apr., 68
Armstrong, Karen A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity & Islam (*Marc M. Arkin*), Jan., 73
Bailyn, Bernard, editor The Debate on the Constitution: Federalist & Antifederalist Speeches, Articles & Letters During the Struggle over Ratification, September 1787 to August 1788 (*Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.*), Sept., 48
Baker, Houston A., Jr. Black Studies, Rap & the Academy (*Terry Teachout*), Sept., 91
Baker, Nicholson The Fermata (*Brooke Allen*), June, 58
Bayles, Martha Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty & Meaning in American Popular Music (*Mark Steyn*), June, 73
Beerbohm, Max A Christmas Garland *with an introduction by N. John Hall* (*John Gross*), Jan., 62
Bell, Ian Dreams of Exile. Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography (*Alan Rutenberg*), Nov., 84
Bellow, Saul It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future (*Sam Tanenhaus*), Apr., 65
Bergman, Ingmar Images: My Life in Film (*Jeremy Murray-Brown*), Apr., 19
Bishop, Elizabeth One Art: Letters *selected & edited by Robert Giroux* (*Elizabeth Spires*), May, 18
Blake, Peter No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture & the Company We Kept (*Roger Kimball*), Jan., 9
Blanchard, Paula The Life of Emily Carr (*Karen Wilkin*), Dec., 26
Bordwell, David The Cinema of Eisenstein (*Jeremy Murray-Brown*), Jan., 79
Bradford, Sarah Slendours & Miseries: A Life of Sacheverell Sitwell (*Jeffrey Meyers*), Dec., 70
Breslin, James E. B. Mark Rothko: A Biography (*Eric Gibson*), Jan., 69
Brown, Kenneth A. Cycles of Rock & Water: At the Pacific Edge (*Patti Hagan*), Apr., 72
Butler, Ruth Rodin: The Shape of Genius (*William Tucker*), Mar., 52
Carey, John The Intellectuals & the Masses: Pride & Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939 (*Hilton Kramer*), Jan., 4
Carr, Emily The Emily Carr Omnibus (*Karen Wilkin*), Dec., 26
Carter, Stephen L. The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law & Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion (*Roger Kimball*), Dec., 10
Cavafy, C. P. Collected Poems. Revised edition. *Translated from the Greek by Edmund Keeley & Philip Sherrard* (*Joseph Epstein*), Jan., 15
Cheever, Benjamin The Partisan (*Brooke Allen*), June, 58
Chukovskaya, Lydia The Akhmatova Journals, Vol. 1, 1938–1941 *translated from the Russian by Milena Michalski & Sylva Rubashova* (*John Simon*), May, 29
Conroy, Frank Body & Soul (*David Klinghoffer*), Oct., 69
Coren, Michael The Invisible Man: The Life & Liberties of H. G. Wells (*Brooke Allen*), Feb., 71
Corry, John My "Times": Adventures in the News Trade (*Hilton Kramer*), Feb., 4
Coupland, Douglas Life After God (*Jeffrey Bloom*), Apr., 79
Diamond, Edwin Behind the "Times": Inside the New "New York Times" (*Hilton Kramer*), Feb., 4
Douglass, Frederick Autobiographies *edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.* (*James W. Tuttleton*), Feb., 16
Dworkin, Ronald Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia & Individual Freedom (*Jenny Teichman*), Nov., 8
Gaddis, William A Frolic of His Own (*Brooke Allen*), Mar., 60
Gray, Francine du Plessix Rage & Fire: A Life of Louise Colet (*Renee Winegarten*), May, 72
Griffiths, Paul Stravinsky (*James F. Penrose*), Nov., 81
Gross, Paul R. & Norman Levitt Higher Superstition: The Academic Left & Its Quarrels with Science (*Roger Kimball*), May, 10
Gunther, Gerald Learned Hand: The Man & the Judge (*Marc M. Arkin*), May, 75
Haines, John The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer: Collected Poems (*Robert Richman*), Dec., 65
Hall, Lee Elaine & Bill: Portrait of a Marriage. The Lives of Willem & Elaine de Kooning (*Eric Gibson*), Jan., 69
Hamilton, Ian Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates & the Rise of Biography from Shakespeare to Plath (*Thomas Mallon*), June, 80

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

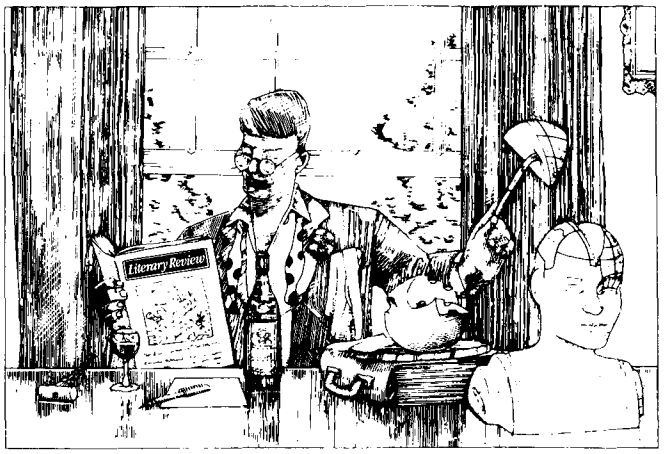
Hedrick, Joan D. Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life (*Marc M. Arkin*), Mar., 72
Heyward, Michael The Ern Malley Affair (*Robert Richman*), Feb., 77
Hill, Carol De Chellis Henry James' Midnight Song (*James W. Tuttleton*), Nov., 89
Hill, Geoffrey New & Collected Poems, 1952–1992 (*William Logan*), Mar., 10
Himmelfarb, Gertrude On Looking into the Abyss: Untimely Thoughts on Culture & Society (*Terry Teachout*), June, 70
Hobbie, Douglas The Day (*Brooke Allen*), June, 58
Holroyd, Michael Bernard Shaw. Vol IV. The Last Laugh: An Epilogue, 1950–1991 *& earlier volumes in the series* (*Brooke Allen*), Sept., 38
Horth, Lynn, editor Herman Melville: Correspondence (*Jonathan Cook*), Dec., 78
Jacobus de Voragine The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints *translated from the Latin by William Granger Ryan* (*George Sim Johnston*), Dec., 62
James, Henry Collected Travel Writings. Vol. I: Great Britain & America; Vol. II: The Continent *edited by Richard Howard* (*Hilton Kramer*), Dec., 6
Kanze, Edward The World of John Burroughs (*Guy Davenport*), Dec., 68
Kendall, Richard Degas Landscapes (*Karen Wilkin*), Mar., 18
Klaw, Spencer Without Sin: The Life & Death of the Oneida Community (*Marc M. Arkin*), Dec., 73
Knox, Bernard The Oldest Dead White European Males & Other Reflections on the Classics *& (as editor)* The Norton Book of Classical Literature (*John Herington*), Oct., 58
Kramnick, Isaac & Barry Sheerman Harold Laski: A Life on the Left (*Edward Shils*), Apr., 24
Layton, Robert Sibelius (*James F. Penrose*), Nov., 81
Levi, Peter Tennyson (*Michael Glover*), Apr., 74
Lipstadt, Deborah E. Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth & Memory (Notes & Comments), Sept., 1
MacDiarmid, Hugh Selected Poetry *edited by Alan Riach & Michael Grieve* (*Michael Glover*), Mar., 67
MacKinnon, Catharine A. Only Words (*Roger Kimball*), Oct., 11
Marnham, Patrick The Man Who Wasn't Maigret: A Portrait of Georges Simenon (*Mark Falcoff*), Jan., 78
Mellor, Ronald Tacitus (*Vasily Rudich*), Mar., 56
Merrill, James A Different Person: A Memoir (*John Simon*), Sept., 75
Mitford, Nancy Love from Nancy: The Letters of Nancy Mitford *edited by Charlotte Mosley* (*Brooke Allen*), Jan., 58
Moody, Rick The Ice Storm (*Brooke Allen*), June, 58
Motion, Andrew Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life (*Christopher Carduff*), Sept., 83
Moyers, Bill Healing & the Mind (*Gerald Weissmann*), Oct., 74
Murdoch, Iris The Green Knight (*Alan Rutenberg*), Jan., 77
Neuman, Alma Always Straight Ahead: A Memoir (*James R. Mellow*), Oct., 67
Ovid The Metamorphoses of Ovid: A New Verse Translation *by Allen Mandelbaum* (*Sara Mack*), Feb., 66
Peters, Catherine The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins (*Brooke Allen*), Dec., 31
Pipes, Richard Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime (*Hilton Kramer*), May, 5
Quindlen, Anna Thinking Out Loud: On the Personal, the Political, the Public & the Private (*James Bowman*), Jan., 53
Ricks, Christopher Beckett's Dying Words (*John Simon*), Jan., 65
Riefenstahl, Leni A Memoir (*Jeremy Murray-Brown*), Nov., 74
Savigneau, Josyane Marguerite Yourcenar: Inventing a Life (*Maria Louise Ascher*), Oct., 62
Scruton, Roger Modern Philosophy: An Introduction & Survey (*Roger Kimball*), June, 10
Sendak, Maurice We Are All in the Dumps with Jack & Guy: Two Nursery Rhymes with Pictures (*Christopher Carduff*), Mar., 63
Seymour, Miranda Ottoline Morrell: Life on the Grand Scale (*Lauren Weiner*), Oct., 73
Silvers, Robert B., Barbara Epstein & Rae S. Hederman, editors The First Anthology: 30 Years of "The New York Review of Books," 1963–1993 (Notes & Comments), Oct., 1
Sinyavsky, Andrei (*Abram Tertz*) Strolls with Pushkin (*Tess Lewis*), Apr., 78
Skidelsky, Robert John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Savior, 1920–1937 (*David Frum*), Apr., 61
Sommers, Christina Hoff Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women (*Heather Mac Donald*), June, 66
Sontag, Susan Alice in Bed: A Play in Eight Scenes (*John Simon*), Oct., 71
Stein, Gertrude A Stein Reader *edited by Ulla E. Dydo* (*Guy Davenport*), Nov., 72
Street, Sean The Wreck of the Deutschland (*Michael Glover*), Dec., 76
Thorn, Michael Tennyson (*Michael Glover*), Apr., 74
Tomlinson, Charles The Door in the Wall (*Robert Richman*), June, 76
Trilling, Diana The Beginning of the Journey: The Marriage of Diana & Lionel Trilling (*Hilton Kramer*), Oct., 6
Tuten, Frederic Tintin in the New World: A Romance (*Clarence Brown*), Nov., 78
Updike, John Brazil (*Christopher Carduff*), Feb., 77
Vidal, Gore United States: Essays 1952–1992 (*Richard Brookhiser*), Sept., 80
Wharton, Edith The Buccaneers *completed by Marion Mainwaring* (*James W. Tuttleton*), Nov., 89
Whistler, Theresa Imagination of the Heart: The Life of Walter de la Mare (*Michael Glover*), Feb., 73
White, Edmund Genet: A Biography (*H. J. Kaplan*), Nov., 68
Whitford, Frank, editor The Bauhaus: Masters & Students by Themselves (*Hilton Kramer*), Mar., 4
Wilson, Edmund The Sixties: The Last Journal, 1960–1972 *edited & with an introduction by Lewis M. Dabney* (*Jeffrey Meyers*), Sept., 88
Wilson, James Q. The Moral Sense (*Roger Kimball*), Sept., 8
Wreszin, Michael A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life & "Politics" of Dwight Macdonald (*Hilton Kramer*), Apr., 5

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Literary Review

Edited by Auberon Waugh

The favourite magazine of England's literati



Thought for food

TAKE OUT A TRIAL SUBSCRIPTION TO ENGLAND'S LIVELIEST LITERARY MAGAZINE.

Literary Review is informative, witty and irreverent. It features some of the most respected writers and journalists such as Julian Barnes, John Mortimer and Bernard Levin, who review all the very latest books.

"This magazine is flush with tight, smart writing." *Washington Post*

Simply fill in the form below and we will send you ONE FREE ISSUE and a FREE SIGNED COPY of *England: An Anthology* by Richard Ingrams. Both the free copy and the book are yours to keep whatever you decide.

NO RISK TRIAL SUBSCRIPTION

YES, please send me my free signed book and my free introductory issue. To continue receiving Literary Review I need do nothing; my year's subscription will start the following month. But if I wish to cancel and receive a full refund, I will write and tell you within 10 days of receiving my first free issue.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____

PLEASE CHARGE MY AMEX ☐ MASTERCARD ☐ VISA ☐

CARD NUMBER ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

SIGNED _____ EXPIRY DATE _____

SUB RATES for 12 monthly issues: USA Airspeed: $48; Canada: $68.
Send to Literary Review, 51 Beak Street, London W1R 3LF, UK.

NC94

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JACOB KAINEN

A Painting Retrospective

Organized by the National Museum of American Art
Walter Hopps, guest curator

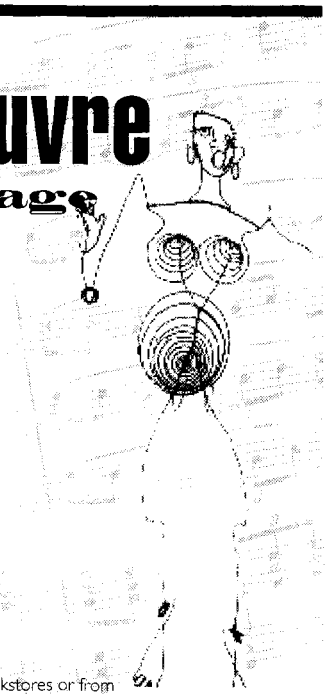
July 1 - October 1, 1994

The Equitable Center Gallery
787 Seventh Avenue (51st-52nd Street) New York, New York 10019
Hours: Mon. - Fri. 11am-6pm, Sat. 12am-5pm
For information call (212) 554-4818

Pyramids at the Louvre

Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to the Postmodernists

GLENN WATKINS



A pyramid in front of the Louvre. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and *The Rite of Spring*. Schoenberg and Shirley Temple. Just as the odd juxtapositions of Modernism produced a new way of seeing, so now collage, in the hands of Glenn Watkins, offers a new perspective on the art of our age. Throughout, collage asserts its power to enlighten through juxtaposition, resist resolution, sponsor pluralism, and promote understanding of an order that eludes all edicts. A rich and revealing picture of twentieth-century music and the arts, Watkins' work shows us what our present Postmodern aesthetic owes to our Modernist past.

The Belknap Press
68 halftones. 17 line illus.
29 musical examples $29.95 cloth

At bookstores or from
Harvard University Press
Toll-free: 1 800 448 2242

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN SLOAN—THE GLOUCESTER YEARS April 26–June 4
Rarely seen paintings and works on paper from 1913 to 1918

THE MASSES; HIS REVERENCE "...LET US PRAY!" (Detail)
ink & crayon, 14¾ x 22½", LR: John Sloan
Reproduced in *The Masses*, Vol. 5, Dec. 1913, pp. 12-13
Hawkes #476

KRAUSHAAR GALLERIES
724 Fifth Ave New York 10019 (212) 307-5730
A fully illustrated catalogue with essay is available, $10 pp.

UGO MULAS

The New York Art Scene in the 60's
and other photographs

May 24 to June 17, 1994

Knoedler & Company
19 East 70 Street, New York Telephone (212) 794-0550

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Sound of Great Ideas!®

The actual voices of . . . W. H. Auden • Robert Frost • Edwin Newman • Gilbert Highet • Edward DeBono • William Saroyan • Robert Lowell • Bruno Bettelheim • Sir Edmund Hillary • Stephen Spender . . . and many others.

HEAR what these provocative thinkers have to say about self-discovery, the quality of life, the nature of the creative mind, changes taking place in the world today, and what you can do to bring about change.

There's a difference in **hearing** new ideas rather than simply reading them. The author is able to provide his or her unique emphasis in ways impossible to accomplish in print. Pauses and tonal changes become meaning and create insights and increased understanding.

And audio cassettes provide a medium for learning experiences that can be shared simultaneously with someone else, thus encouraging immediate discussion and interaction.

Today's audio cassettes capture the inflections, nuances and flavor of the original speaker, and let you hear them over and over while driving, cooking, jogging, etc. Since some of these voices will never be heard again, here's your opportunity to savor the sound of great ideas that have shaped today's world, and to own these cassettes for your library.

From the more than 4,000 titles in the prestigious Audio-Forum Library, we have selected 26 extraordinary recordings. Imagine hearing these dynamic personalities in the intimacy of your own home! The regular price per cassette is $13.95. **But now for the special price of $9.95 you have the opportunity to listen whenever and wherever you choose. PLUS for every 3 cassettes you buy, we'll send you a cassette of your choice FREE!**

"The Sound of Great Ideas"
Audio-Forum, Room G602,
Guilford, CT 06437. (203) 453-9794

The 26 audio cassettes listed here were chosen by a panel of experts who were asked to select only tapes which would be timely and relevant. Each has passed the simple test of genuine interest: "Would you want to listen to this tape again?"
HEAR these famous speakers:

- Ⓐ **W. H. Auden:** *The Poetry of W. H. Auden* (59 min.)
- Ⓑ **Richard Avedon:** *An Interview with Richard Avedon* (60 min.)
- Ⓒ **Bruno Bettelheim:** *Man's Identity in a Mass Society* (48 min.)
- Ⓓ **Alistair Cooke:** *America: An Outside View* (55 min.)
- Ⓔ **Edward De Bono:** *How to Change Ideas* (55 min.)
- Ⓕ **Robert Frost:** *An Evening with Robert Frost* (55 min.)
- Ⓖ **Buckminster Fuller:** *Twentieth-Century Renaissance* (55 min.)
- Ⓗ **Gilbert Highet:** *The Art of Invective/A Bouquet of Poison Ivy* (30 min.)
- Ⓘ **Gilbert Highet:** *Proverbs and Anatomy of Slang* (30 min.)
- Ⓙ **Sir Edmund Hillary:** *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win* (55 min.)
- Ⓚ **G. Wilson Knight:** *Shakespeare and the English Language* (30 min.)
- Ⓛ **Robert Lowell:** *Reads and Discusses His Poetry* (28 min.)
- Ⓜ **Joseph Mazzeo:** *Machiavelli: Practical Politician or Devil?* (50 min.)
- Ⓝ **Joseph Mazzeo:** *The Idea of Progress: Science and Poetry* (46 min.)
- Ⓞ **Edwin Newman:** *Decline and Fall of American Language* (55 min.)
- Ⓟ **R. Ornstein & D. Galin:** *Our Two Brains: Rational & Intuitive* (56 min.)
- Ⓠ **Asimov & Pohl:** *Science Fiction: The Early Days* (55 min.)
- Ⓡ **William Saroyan:** *The Real World of the Writer* (48 min.)
- Ⓢ **Albert Schweitzer:** *On Goethe (trans. by Thornton Wilder)* (80 min.)
- Ⓣ **Idries Shah:** *Framework for New Knowledge* (44 min.)
- Ⓤ **Upton Sinclair:** *A Pen to Change America* (40 min.)
- Ⓥ **Stephen Spender:** *T.S. Eliot and George Orwell* (41 min.)
- Ⓦ **Eudora Welty:** *Learning to Write Fiction* (53 min.)
- Ⓧ **William Wester:** *Ten Commandments of Communication* (23 min.)
- Ⓨ **Frank Lloyd Wright:** *Acoustics & Architecture* (34 min.)
- Ⓩ **Frank Lloyd Wright:** *The Architect: Master of the Know-How* (34 min.)

"The Sound of Great Ideas" I understand that for every 3 cassettes I order, I will get one FREE!

Please send me the following selections at $9.95 each plus $1.00 shipping charge for the first tape, and .50 for each additional tape.
(CT residents add sales tax.)
For every 3 tapes paid for, I selected a free one.

My selections: ○○○ ○○○
My free selection: ○ ○

❑ I am enclosing $1 for your Audio Catalog.
❑ Here is my order; please send Audio Catalog FREE.

NAME (print) _____

ADDRESS, APT# _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

SIGNATURE _____

Total amount of order: $_____
(Including tax and shipping)

❑ Check enclosed ❑ American Express
❑ VISA ❑ MasterCard ❑ Diners Club
❑ Discover Card

Expiration Date: _____

Card# _____

Mail To: **AUDIO-FORUM®**
Room G602, 96 Broad St., Guilford, CT 06437

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Verdi-Boito Correspondence

Edited by Marcello Conati and Mario Medici

English language edition prepared by William Weaver

These 301 letters between Giuseppe Verdi and his last, most gifted librettist, Arrigo Boito, document an extraordinary chapter in musical history. Now available for the first time in English, this correspondence records both a unique friendship and its creative legacy with an arresting immediacy. A necessity for students and scholars and delight for all opera buffs and music lovers.

"A must-have for every music lover's shelf." —*Kirkus Reviews*

Cloth $29.95 384 pages
Music examples throughout text

Under Review

Further Writings on Writers, 1946-1990

Anthony Powell

Reviewing Anthony Powell's *Miscellaneous Verdicts*, Daniel Max wrote in the *Washington Post*, "For people who care about writing, a book of the sort Mr. Powell has put together here is a treasure trove." With generous wit, telling insight, and remarkable range, this consummate novelist, takes the occasion of reviewing a vast number of novels and biographies to comment on the style and substance, in life as well as art, of writers from Oscar Wilde to Saki, Walter Pater to P. G. Wodehouse, James Joyce to Aldous Huxley.

Cloth $34.95 480 pages

Winner of the MLA Scaglione Prize

Esteem Enlivened by Desire

The Couple from Homer to Shakespeare

Jean H. Hagstrum

"In this challenging and pioneering study of lasting love from classical antiquity to the Renaissance, Jean Hagstrum provides an illuminating account of social relationships and cultural values as set forth in major texts. . . . Hagstrum's brilliant reinterpretation of a central preoccupation of European culture is a landmark achievement that will surely constitute the standard study of the subject."—Citation from the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize Committee of the Modern Language Association.

Cloth $36.00 532 pages illus.

CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

5801 South Ellis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60637

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ABOUT COLOR

June 18 – July 29

Charles Arnoldi
Macyn Bolt
Nicola De Maria
Nancy Evans
Caio Fonseca
Günther Förg
Mary Heilmann
Nicholas Howey
Jacqueline Humphries
Gary Lang
Jonathan Lasker
Melissa Meyer
Andrew Spence
Taro Suzuki
Juan Uslé

Charles Cowles Gallery

420 West Broadway New York, NY 10012 Tel (212) 925-3500

The New Criterion
850 Seventh Avenue
Suite 503
New York NY 10019

Second Class Postage
Paid at New York, NY
and at additional
Mailing Offices

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED